

Halloween, , All Saints Day, All Souls Day – Día de los Muertos October 31st, 2019
Readings from Pentecost 24B: Ruth 1:1-18, Psalm 149, Ephesians 1:11-23 (Hebrews 9:11-14 – last year), Luke 6:20-31

Connectedness

Introduction

I was born a twin. Two babies were not expected – only one. We were very premature. I was the first born, my sister, Dorothy, came later. I survived, Dorothy did not. I have no clear early memory of stories about our birth. They were repressed for obvious reasons – the pain of it all was too much to relive. I do understand that just as little was said in the family, the actual event of her death, hours days after her birth, was not accompanied by a funeral or formal cremation. She was simply dispatched. All energies turned to saving me: a process of not just weeks, or months, but years. At the age of 15, I experienced a dream. It was as clear as day. In that dream, I experienced Dorothy – we spoke, we inter-acted. I shared that experience some-time later with my mother, aware that I needed to be prudent in what I said. On balance, it was a good thing to share with her, although the whole idea of engagement with a dead sister was hard to manage for both of us.

The impact of that experience, has coloured my thinking over the years. I believe that it was real. I believe that while it was not a strictly rational experience, nor was it irrational. I refer to it as supra-rational thing – beyond the rational. The experience has also shaped my understanding of the importance of connectedness, as a dimension of being human: that just as we are tied back to God as creatures (*religare*) we are also tied to each other: but not just with those who are our contemporaries (horizontal connectedness) but also to those who have preceded us (vertical connectedness).

Scripture, Halloween, Day of the Dead and All Saints Day

But does this intuition, this conviction of mine about the importance of connectedness have any real basis when we think through the lens of Christian theology and ethics? Let's refer to biblical thought first of all, and then turn to the Christian Calendar, to Christian feasts or festivals.

In Scripture, the idea of the connectedness to God is reiterated time and time again. It is fundamental to the Gospels and to the Letters – nor would it be new to you. Perhaps most obvious is the Gospel of John which speaks about our indwelling (*menein*), a mutuality with God through Jesus. Scripture also speaks repeatedly about our connectedness with each other as fundamental to human well-being. In Christian ethics that is given its highest expression in the commitment to the doctrine of the common good – the good of all.

Indeed, our two readings today, celebrate the importance of connectedness. In the Book of Ruth there is the loving loyalty (*chesed*) of Ruth to her mother-in-law, Naomi; and in the Gospel of Luke, we hear the so-called "Sermon on the Plain", that speaks about God's special connectedness *with* the poor of history, the people who in the scheme of things are always invisible, ignored. This is the inspiration behind the many forms of liberation theology that have arisen through the centuries: the most articulate stemming from the spiritual wells of Latin America during the last 40 years.

In sum then: connectedness is what the Hebrew tradition and the Christian Gospels celebrate: with God and with each other. That said, it is not until we get to the Book of Hebrews (not included today), that we discover a new insight, this idea of vertical connectedness, our *connectedness with those who have preceded us, gone before us, those who have passed to us the stories*

about life and faith. The term that is used for these people who are our ancestors in the faith, is “a cloud of witnesses”. We are, says the author of Hebrews, connected to them through history and we look to them for encouragement, as we attempt to meaningfully live out, to interpret our own human and Christian identity.

Now that in essence is what *All Saint's Day* is about.... My first real experience of this Christian idea of connectedness to those who have gone before us in the faith, was a photo – decades old – of my partner Gilda, with her father sitting in the cemetery of their home town of Collipulli in southern Chile. There was Gilda, large as life, about 8 years of age, sitting and feasting amid her grandparents and aunts' and uncles' tombs, on what Latin Americans refer to as *Día de los Muertos* (*Day of the Dead, October 31st*). For a 'clean-minded' rationalist Protestant like me, it seemed so macabre, uncomfortably mystical, even superstitious; but she explained to me: “this is all about love, this is all about connectedness between us and those who shaped us, who provided the very foundation of life for us”. She added, “some of my family were more Christian than others, some were more compassionate than others. But collectively they are ours and we are theirs.”

Romantic Nonsense?

Is this all just romanticism? I think not! All Saints Day, not to mention the insights of the Hebrew Bible, the Gospels and the Book of Hebrews are an important *corrective* to the way we moderns, or post-moderns think. We have become diminished, reduced in our understanding of connectedness. Modern market capitalism really only permits communities to function from their consumption habits. Brands, especially status brands bring people together as tribes, through which others will honour us and we others; just as old totems in ancient societies, created cults of loyalty. Apple, BMW, Audi, Cartier, Armani, Rolex, the list never ends.

But it was the humanism of the Bible that undercut and undercuts these sorts of closed, provisional understandings of connectedness. The covenant with a God who creates out of *an overflow of love*, liberated the ancient world from its cults of objects and commodities. The love of God, created a new horizon altogether – marked by a generosity of connectedness with others who were different: the freeperson and the slave, the women and the man, the living and the dead, human beings and the creation.

Connectedness: connectedness with the God of life, connectedness with each other within history and across history, with our contemporaries and with those who have preceded us, with those of the faith – before and now – a profound, radical understanding of how to live: that, that is life!