

**Halloween, All Saints Day, All Souls Day - Día de los Muertos, Sunday,
November 1st, 2020**

**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

There were several desires that drove me toward the Christian Church and ultimately to ordination. Not in any order, they were, space for intellectual freedom, and the gift of community. Both were crucial to me, as I look back. The freedom to think, rather than be told what and how to think, was fundamental to me: as important as oxygen. But the balance to that freedom was the importance of community, to think together, to relate to, to connect to others in the faith adventure. But there was another side to this search for community: something more basic, something more primordial: the heartache of solitude, the reality of loneliness. As I considered my life in my early twenties, I was mindful of the existential reality of our aloneness as human beings. It was during those years that the importance of community, connectedness took hold of me. To become fully human I understood that I needed others. Later on in my studies in theology, I was able to confirm that instinct. I learnt that theology understands that we are "tied back" (*religare*) to our roots in God, whether we acknowledge it or not. In like manner we are also tied back to each other, whether we like it or not.

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

What I would like to do this morning is to explore this idea of connectedness to God and each other through the lens of Scripture and then Halloween (All Hallows), All Saints and All Souls Days. 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 (*menen*), 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, three of our 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, that we discover a new insight: 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 Saints Day and All Souls Day* are 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 wife 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."

Pious Claptrap

Is this all just pious nonsense? I think not! All Saints Day, not to mention the insights of the Hebrew Bible, the Gospels and the Book of Hebrews; taken as a whole, is an important *corrective* to the way we moderns, or post-moderns think – beneficiaries but no less prisoners of our individualism and isolation.

The Italian economist, Luigino Bruni, speaks eloquently of the importance of the Christian idea of connectedness as a way of battling, resisting disconnectedness and loneliness. In an article translated and published on the ABC Religion and Ethics website, entitled, "Our Modern Disconnectedness", Bruni, speaks of how modern market capitalism really only permits communities to function from their consumption habits. Brands bring people together as tribes, just as old totems and emblems in ancient societies, created cults of loyalty. As I read his piece, I could not help but think of the Apple label and its cultic status, where people became starry-eyed, robots, under the charisma of the CEO. He ends by saying this:

Biblical humanism fought the idolatries of its time, [which isolated and tribalized people] in order to free them from the totemic and pagan cults of the surrounding environments . The covenant with a God who creates out of an overflow of love, was also the liberation from the cults of objects and commodities, where they enchanted and chained people with their magic and occult powers.

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 – that, that is life!