

All Souls “Instinctual Transcendence”

Bishop Frank Schuster

My friends, the one thing that preoccupies the soul the most is the reality of death. 20th century philosophers and theologians, like Heidegger and Rahner, have argued that human beings are unconsciously preoccupied with death. So much so that every decision we make big or small is influenced unconsciously by the fact that one day we will die. Sigmund Freud argued that human beings do a variety of abnormal behaviors trying to help us forget that we are one day going to die. The preoccupation of the soul towards death can be seen in every facet of society. We saw it a couple nights ago on Halloween. One can almost count on one hand the number of movies that were released in the last decade that didn't have someone dying in it. We see this preoccupation with death in our art, we can hear it in our music, we see it on the television, and from time to time, we experience death in real life in the passing away of a loved one.

My friends, we were born in mystery, we live our lives with the knowledge that our time on this earth is limited, and then one day our bodies die. Death feels like as much of mystery as birth. Even though we live with the knowledge of our finite nature, there is something within us however that we sense is infinite that communicates to us at a very primal level that our souls will live on after death. This sense of transcendence, which is at the heart of being human, is what separates us from any other creature. We also see this transcendence in our art, at the movie theater, in our music and on the television. There is something in us that knows that death is not the end. This feeling of transcendence is at the heart of every religion, most of all in Christianity. And as Pope Benedict argues in *Spe Salvi, Saved in Hope*, perhaps inspired a bit by Heidegger, whether or not we have hope in the future has a direct bearing on the choices we make in the present. If we do not hope in our future, why wouldn't we simply serve ourselves in the present to the best of our ability? If we trusted in Jesus' promises for our future, why wouldn't we try to follow Lord by the choices we make?

Our Gospel begins with Lazarus having been dead for four days. This number is significant because it is an ancient way of telling us that he was really and truly dead. The author of life, Jesus, arrives in Bethany to console Martha and Mary on the occasion of their brother's death. Mary is so grieved that she cannot get herself to go out and meet Jesus. Mary is depressed, a natural human response to the loss of a loved one. Martha marches out to Jesus with some anger, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!” Martha is angry, another natural human response to the loss of a loved one. All of us who have lost a loved one remember feeling emotions of numbness, depression, and anger, even anger towards God. Jesus reassures Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if they die, will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Do you believe this? That is the question our Lord gives Martha and poses to us on All Souls Day. Eventually in life, when confronted with death, we will all hear the Lord's promise that he is the resurrection and the life. Every would-be disciple must give

an answer the Lord's question, "Do you believe this?" Martha answers for Christians everywhere, "Yes Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world."

My friends, on this feast of All Souls, we remember our loved ones who have died. We entrust their souls into the arms of our living God. We believe that when we die we will come face to face with our Creator. At that moment we will know whether we will enter into heaven or whether we will be eternally separated from God. The decision of how we will be spending our eternity will be paradoxically our own. The sum total of our decisions in life will either say "yes" to God or "no" to God. God will either happily or sadly respect our fundamental option for or against God. Most of us I think will spend time in purgatory, a place where the many "no's" we have given to God by our actions or inactions during our life will be purged and healed prior to our entrance into the glory of heaven. This is my own personal opinion: the phenomenon of ghosts could sometimes be souls who are in purgatory, visiting familiar places trying to reconcile life events in the process of preparing themselves for heaven. This is why we should pray for the souls in purgatory, especially loved ones who have recently passed on. On this feast of All Souls, it is a good time to remember the Fatima Prayer, "O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, and lead all souls to heaven especially those in most need of thy mercy." This is a beautiful prayer praying for the salvation of all and an appropriate prayer for today.

Meanwhile, on this feast of All Souls, we ought to remember that we need to be prepared for the hour of our own death. If we have committed any wrongs then we should try to be reconciled with God through the sacrament of Reconciliation and be reconciled with our neighbor as well before we die. Remember that our deaths typically can come at a time we least expect so we must not put off until tomorrow the good we should be doing today. On this feast of All Souls, we remember all who have gone before us and we remember that we will join them one day. It is a healthy thing to think about our mortality every so often and make sure our affairs are in order.

In conclusion, let us take a moment and pray for all the souls in our lives we have known, especially for those who might be in purgatory so to lift them up to God asking for his mercy and forgiveness.

Prayer for All Souls Day

Lord God,
you are the glory of believers
and the life of the just.
Your son redeemed us
by dying and rising to life again.
Let our family and friends who have passed
before us in faith be embraced by your merciful love.
Forgive any wrongs that have been committed
And welcome their beloved spirits into the warm embrace of your unending peace.

May they forever share the joys and blessings of the life to come!
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord.
R/ And let perpetual light shine upon them.
May they rest in peace.
R/ Amen.
May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed
Through the mercy of God rest in peace.
R/ Amen.