

All Souls 2023 “Dare We Hope”

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Twentieth century theologian Hans Urs von Balthazar wrote a controversial little book, *Dare We Hope That All Men Be Saved*. It's a must read for theologians, however, it is a question that we can naturally ponder on a day like All Souls Day. Yesterday, we celebrated All Saints. It was truly a celebration because we know they are in heaven and can intercede for us. Dare we hope that all souls be saved? For me, it is like I have Kirkegaard on one shoulder saying, “Are you nuts? Look at the horror in the Middle East, of what souls are capable of doing to other souls.” And then there is Balthazar on the other shoulder saying, “there, there, because of the paschal mystery I can hope that all can be saved if at the same time I understand that in the end I might be lost”. There is also Pope Benedict's encyclical “*Spe Salve*” which a beautiful presentation of the theology of hope, that the hope we have in the future should have an effect on how we see and act in the present in a way that those who do not have faith simply can't”. And there is Pope Francis' exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, that stresses the need for a renewed relationship with Jesus Christ before he speaks of Missionary Discipleship because we are ineffective in our mission if we are not first disciples.

All the people we love and remember today on All Souls, we have hope for them, and it is a founded hope. Jesus says in our Gospel reading, “This is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it on the last day.” What sobers us of course is Jesus' own parables where souls are separated like wheat from chaff or sheep from goats. I therefore think that it is fair to say that God wills all to be saved and for us to have joy and have it completely so long as I also hold that the only one in the universe that is powerful enough to confound the divine will for my salvation is me. My thoughts, words and actions matter. Free will matters. I wonder sometimes if pastors these days do not put enough emphasis that, although it is right to hope, that we are also in danger, that in the end I or my loved ones might be lost. With all the evil souls do to each other in our world today, I wonder if a homily that preaches for more humility before the throne of God is better medicine so that our hope does not replace our prayers for mercy?

I say that because to be human is to be a hot mess. The souls we pray for today were like us. I hope when I die, people will pray for my soul, that my sins will be forgiven and that I will be united to Jesus. With all the funeral homilies that canonize people before they are buried, dare I hope for that? My friends, it feels right that today I am dressed in this vestment and not the same white vestment I wore yesterday for the celebration of All Saints. It feels right that today we remember all who have gone before us, with all their virtues but also all their warts, and pray that they receive the healing they need that only Jesus can give. If we pray for their salvation, it is good to remember that we call it salvation for a reason.

My friends, today is also a *memento mori* in that, not unlike Ash Wednesday, we are reminded of our own mortality. Where our loved one go, we will follow. We are also reminded again there is a brokenness inside of us that we simply cannot fix. There is a violence inside of us and inside the whole human race. We see it in the poor choices we personally make at times to how nations treat other nations. As hard as we try, in time we eventually come to grips with the

reality that we cannot save ourselves. We cannot save ourselves from our sins. We can't save ourselves from the hurts that befall us. We most certainly cannot save ourselves from death. The Gospel today is Good News in that it speaks to Jesus desire to be our savior. "This is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him on the last day". What this hope offers us is: in the end, God does not want us to die. God wants us to live. God does not want us to despair. God wants us to know joy and have it completely. This is why God made us for himself. This is why God gave us his only Son so to redeem us, to teach us the light of his Gospel, so we can become one with him forever. We want this for ourselves. We want this for our loved ones. The Church blesses us with today with this opportunity to commemorate all souls. And so, let us take a moment to simply remember our loved ones who passed away last year. Afterwards, we will conclude this time with a prayer we all know.

Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord.

And let perpetual light shine upon them.

May they rest in peace. Amen.

May the souls of all the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace. Amen.