

Sacramental Moment— Election

Today is a special time, so special that it might be a sacramental moment, which cannot be forced or invoked but happens under certain conditions. We observe such a “wrinkle in time” this time of year when we both celebrate all the saints as well as to remember all faithful departed—All Saints Day/All Souls Day, November 1st and 2nd. And also the previous evening, All Hallows Eve, October 31st—the line on the fold of that “wrinkle.” An original Halloween custom, rather than to knock on a door to receive a treat, was instead to bring a treat, a sweet taste of life, to the lonely who might have suffered a recent loss or who were going to be particularly exposed to the harshness of the coming winter—an indigenous custom, an act of compassion; thereby also ennobling the living not to fear.

The conditions of “sacrament” are trust and vulnerability. That which thwarts the “sacramental moment,” and which even threatens to pervert the substrate of existence is fear—walling one’s self in: family, neighborhood, nation. Trust and vulnerability open doors to meeting, are the hinges of faith. “Faith is the responsibility of an I for a You” (H. Richard Niebuhr).

People of faith don’t talk “rights” but responsibilities—not “the right to bear...” but the responsibility to bear others.

Our words, our prayers, our songs are all about this deep intimacy, our relationships. The responsibility of an I for a You is the *responsibility* between one and another. The “other” is another I, full of Christ: not a means to my getting somewhere nor an obstacle to things as I want them.

In openness to this intimacy is the sacramental awareness that who I am, who I become, is interconnected with your becoming all God has in store for you. As Martin Luther King, Jr. once put it: “We are bound to each other in an inescapable web of mutuality”. As Martin Buber, Jewish theologian wrote: “All real living is meeting”.

A “wrinkle in time”—past and future crease upon each other now. These moments pass but provide vision of God’s creation and impress upon us the commitment to be part of what builds us up—enfleshment/incarnation—and sustains community/commonwealth.

On this day, every day, words matter, quietly imparted; longingly, lovingly. What you say to a young child, a baby—have you ever noticed—and to those who have died: the words are one and the same; intimate, felt. Words of love, hope; promises of protection made to the newborn, thanks extended to those loved ones who came before, encouragement and uplift; even forgiveness sought and granted in our conversations

with the dead, warm and tender not cold. In so many ways, saying to the living and the dead, in the sacramental moment, “You are filled with God... You make me more aware of the God in me... the God, the Spirit between us”.

Betweenness. This “betweenness,” neither of us own, is the way, the truth, the life. Betweenness – Spirit – we meet: In the sacramental moment, an I meets You. Even more, I meets Thou. I bow to you, the God in Thou, in me, in all others.

Yes, words matter. What are we saying to this baby, James, about to be baptized? You have an inheritance. You are marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit. May the eyes of your heart be enlightened; see and live the hope to which God has called you (cf. Ephesians 1:11-23). You are given the grace to live the life of a saint—someone blessed, not cursed. And even if someone tries to hurt you, to curse you, the power of God working in Christ works in you. Listen for God, who will not let you forget, because God does not forget you. You are called O Blessed One.

Blessed are you, little one. The success of your life will not be measured in dollars but by your sensing God’s embrace, love, kingdom. You will never be impoverished if you have eyes are heart open to Christ coming again, and again, in everyone you meet. You are blessed, my little one. When you weep, when you have hungers, fear not. Have faith. You will smile and laugh and be satisfied. If people exclude you and revile you, do not let their indifference or hatred change you. Love more. Do good. Bless. Pray for those who would strike you. Rejoice and leap for joy. Swing wide the gate. Remember the hinges of faith. O Blessed One, give of yourself. For to you much is given. (cf Luke 6:20-31)

Renounce evil. Refuse to give in to the snickers and shaming from those who say the world is harsh and cruel get used to it. Say no to the evil which corrupts societal structures with greed and polarizing injustices which exacerbate tensions and pit people against each other. Say no to your selfish me 1st. How? Disarmingly simple, but a lifetime of trusting God’s embrace as really present; trusting love as salvation. Love heals, love nourishes; love is strength. Turn to Jesus, trust his love; listen to his leading.

There are times when you will fall O Blessed One. We all do. But God is there to catch us, to lift us up. When you listen and accept God’s forgiveness of you, God makes you gracious in love again. And it is with this gracious power that you can and will go out and meet others—seeking and serving Christ in all persons. Your striving for justice and peace has no borders, knows no boundaries. Respect the dignity of every human being. (cf The Baptismal Liturgy in the Book of Common Prayer)

O Blessed One—you are bathed in the waters of God’s Creation; you are washed in your parents and Christ’s tears of joy for your new creation; you are sanctified to grow up, to rise up out of these waters, for the work God has given us all to do. You are sealed, anointed. This is a profound and wondrous “election day”. Elected, chosen, set apart for a sacred responsibility: God is calling you (and thereby reminding us) to show others this way of faith, hope and love—just as God calls Israel to walk with God;

just as Christ calls us to allow ourselves to become the flesh and blood of the body of Christ, the building material of the Church without walls; just as the Spirit beckons all people of faith the world over.

The faith of a lifetime, quiet words, little actions nurturing the baby, guiding the boy, congratulating the girl; celebrating, giving thanks, reaching out: meeting the other. The rich texture of such sacramental living prepares us for decision-making and faithfulness in hard times—Faith, not fear, when the light flickers or a monster roars.

Whether gathered at the Baptismal Font or surveying the landscape where those we love we see no longer, the words we speak and the respect we show inform all our actions. This is who we are. This is what we do—Together: Through Christ and with Christ and in Christ, making of this world a commonwealth for all and, hopeful, trusting God's joy of the life to come.

Amen.

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