

All Souls Day

The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed
November 2, 2008

QUEEN OF PEACE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA
Rev. Jeff McGowan

1ST READING: WISDOM 3:1-9

The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them.

PSALM 23

The Lord is my Shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.

2ND READING: ROMANS 6:3-9

Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.

GOSPEL: JOHN 6:37-40

I will not reject anyone who comes to me...

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This is the day we celebrate and pray for those who we remember who have gone ahead of us into death, All Souls Day. What do you imagine death will be like? Do you ever think about it? Woody Allen said, "I am not afraid of death; I just don't want to be there when it happens." What will it be like?

Dying is pretty simple. We breathe in, we breathe out. We breathe in, we breathe out. We breathe in, we breathe out... We don't breathe in. That's it; nothing to it really.

We believe that the next things are judgment, heaven or hell or purgatory. And that's the part I invite you to imagine for yourself. I'll get a little personal here and tell you how I imagine it from an early experience. On my first day of first grade at St. Lawrence School, Sister gave us signs with our names on them to hang around our necks. In those days we were required to have saints' names and my middle name is Anthony. Sister thought that was the more important name for me and put "Anthony" on my sign. I was "Anthony" until the first recess. Then I ran away. My family lived across a road like Newberry road. Everyone was worried. My dad managed a power company and all the office staff who could be spared, all the sales force, all the meter readers and repairmen, everyone who could get in their cars and went searching for his six year old son. Also, the priests, custodians, every aide or staff person who could be spared as

well as volunteers were in their cars driving around searching for me. In those days people didn't have cell phones. I took a back way to my grandparents house and my grandmother was serving me molasses cookies when my dad thought to check there. And this is how I imagine it will be after we die: my dad dragged me down the long corridor of my school to the principal's office. I was fighting, trying to dig in with my heels, grabbing anything I could trying to get away, and screaming. I did not want to go. That's the way I think it is when we die on our way to meet the judge. That's why we pray for our dead relatives and friends; and that's why we want to teach our children so they will pray for us as well. We want to help those we love get through that corridor with our prayers just as my dad helped me get to my future on that first day of school.

Why wouldn't we resist? Unless we are well practiced in trusting God, we have no reason to think this would be any different than our human experience in this world. Everything in this world is limited, every human being, every material thing is limited. So after countless disappointments, things that didn't live up to expectations, we are afraid that this court would be as human as courts are here. Our prayers, we believe, help those we love get on with their new lives.

My dad took me to the principal's office and I met my teacher. After that I didn't need a sign, Sister knew--that whole school knew--I am Jeff. In death we meet the judge but he is not sitting high above on some platform behind a big desk. He is on his throne. That is, he is on his cross, nails through his bones, nerve endings twitching in pain, blood dropping, and crown of thorns on his head. Looking into his eyes, we see our own lives with perfect clarity. And we see the love that does not disappoint. We experience the judgment of the one who totally understands us, needs no explanations, isn't interested in our opinions, and `doesn't want to hear about anybody else. He will be so totally focused on me and I will finally know what limitless love feels like.

Then for me, it will be like running through the tunnel into Ben Hill Griffen stadium with 90,000 happy ancestors, saints and friends cheering, screaming, clapping, for me. That's how I imagine my death, how do you imagine your own? I pray the ending is good news!

