

All Saints Sunday 2011

In preparation for my recent travels, I loaded up my electronic reading device with reading material to pass the time at airports and to leverage the time so that it would be productive. I did have the time to read Rob Bell's book. Rob Bell is the guy who started that mega-church Mars Hill in Michigan in 1999. His book, which has caused, and I quote: "a firestorm among evangelicals" is called *Love Wins: A book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person who ever Lived*.<sup>1</sup> I choose to mention some of the things he talks about because not only do I agree with him on many of his beliefs, but I think many of his thoughts are appropriate to our celebrations today.

Rob believes, as I do, in a loving God; one who does not punish people for their sins, and send them to hell. We believe that God does judge, but also gives us opportunities to join into God's eternal, heavenly kingdom right here, right now, on earth as it is also in the future time of our existence, which is when we die to our mortal bodies. You can see how that got him into a lot of trouble with the fire and brimstone people. They wanted punishment, not the gift of discernment and teaching about which things are good to act upon and what to avoid. All Saints is a part of the time in the liturgical Christian year that we begin

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<sup>1</sup> Bell, Rob. HarperOne, March 15, 2011.

to look forward to the next year, the dawning of the new age which begins with Advent, the time of anticipation of the birth of Christ. We also are reminded of our own mortality and the lives of those we love who have gone before us. Those who have died, all of our Saints, become enfolded into that eternal place, *Kyros*, "God's time," which is not our mortal time of *Kronos*, the time we live by with our Timex watches.

We honor our loved ones, represented today by the many strips of paper bands which make up the chains found along our altar rails and beyond. We honor them with our daily and weekly prayers, and we honor them by living the lives we are set out to live by our God-to become the people God has created us to be. I believe that we are truly created, not in sin, but as unique faces, or facets of God.

Sometimes, in English graveyards, you will see tombstones marked with three dates: the first date is the date of the person's birth; the second date is the date of that person's baptism; and the third date is identified as "the second death." We Christians know that the first death is Jesus' death. We enter our own first death when we are baptized. Whatever hope we have for victory and triumph over death is completely rooted and grounded in Jesus' death and Resurrection. And when we are baptized, we too are dying to sin.

But not sin that we were born with! God does not create junk! We, or our sponsors if we are infants, consciously renounce sin and are cleansed by the waters of Baptism. This is why this Feast Day of All Saints is one of the traditional times of the church year that Baptisms are performed. Today, we will soon reaffirm our Baptismal vows instead of reciting the Nicene Creed.

*Love Wins.* What a great title for a theological book! What a great way to view life-and death! Today we commit ourselves to life-eternal life. We also commit ourselves to support this church by pledging to support it financially and with our additional resource of time and talent. Those of you who have not already pledged have the opportunity to place your pledge cards in the plates during the offertory. All of your commitments will be blessed. This is an incarnational way of showing your love of God, your gratitude for all that God has given to you.

We are called to choose between life and death. Not in a literal sense as fixed states or destinations. Our scriptures call us to choose the vital connection with the living God, which offers us peace and wholeness, instead of the one which is less connected to God, the one where we wander in fear, surround by despair and destruction.

Because the communion of saints is a fellowship of love, we cannot commune with those we love who are beyond our sight unless we love our brothers and sisters whom we can see now, those in our families, in our communities, and in the world. Our communion with God and Gods saints will only be as effective and as good as our love, our care and concern for our neighbors.

The only hell that I am aware of is the one that we ourselves create. When we are stingy, not only with our money, but with our love-that is when we are in hell. When we are angry or abusive toward other people because of our own insecurities-that also is when we are in hell. And when we are so afraid of love because we fear rejection, when we have lost hope, lost hope of resurrection of our own misdeeds, then we are also in hell.

God's Good News is always offered to us. God's arms are always stretched out wide open to us, waiting for us to step toward those loving arms, to enter into that heavenly place which exists both here on earth and also in that eternal place which we call heaven. It is the place, which exists now and forever, in *Kronos and at Kyros*, where all of the saints, both known to us and those unknown wait for us.

“What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 1 John 3:1-3