

## 1 November 2015 All Saints

Isaiah 25:6-9

Psalm 24

Revelation 21:1-6a

John 11:32-44

[All Saints B November 1, 2015](#) Textweek

Today we acknowledge **All Saints' Day**, also known as **All Hallows** which is why we had **Halloween**; a contraction of All Hallows' Evening last night.

The catholic and so the orthodox understanding of "Saints" is a very primitive invention that separates the good from the bad and it gives 'power' and control to a select few who create and maintain such separations within the institutional church..

Such foundational and orthodox beliefs have shaped our being Christian and our being Church; and the reminder on the cover of the service sheet urging catholic congregations; "Don't forget to pray for the Poor Souls in Purgatory from November 1 to the 8th", serves to reinforce the gatekeeping role of the Church, directing some to heaven, others to hell, and still others to somewhere in between, until certain criteria were met for a final destination.

However, we might take this 'All Saints' opportunity to question our beliefs, to question what "saints" might actually represent for us; and as we engage such questions, we might then explore the very shape of our faith.

Now before we condemn that idea as too hard, or consign it to the 'boring basket'; pause and consider the implications of 'what we believe'; for if we were truly aware of the shaping influence of 'belief' then we might actually be more interested in seeking further, rather than holding on to the primitive bumper-sticker theology that arose in an unenlightened past age.

Every week in news from around the world we find frightening examples of the implications associated with primitive orthodoxy.

In Syria ISIS stoned to death two gay men last week in the latest of their orthodox 'teachings'.

In India, a couple of weeks ago, a 50-year-old labourer was beaten to death by a mob in his small two-storey home in the centre of Bishara village, about an hour's drive beyond the outskirts of Delhi, India's capital. The mob that killed him believed that he and his family, who are Muslim, had eaten meat from a cow, an animal considered sacred by the 80% of the Indian population who follow the Hindu faith.

In the Vatican during a recent 'synod for the Family' convened by the pope to explore new insights into changing family dynamics; Cardinal Pell , Australia's most senior roman catholic, put the brakes on by saying "Not even a council with and under a pope can change essential Catholic moral teachings sanctioned by Scripture and the Magisterium."

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In the USA 42% believe the Creationist view of human origins, they continue to believe that God created humans in their present form 10,000 years ago.

Such simplistic belief systems were echoed in planning for the invasion of Iraq when President Bush, a born-again Christian used the word "crusade" five days after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11. "This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while," the president said.

In Nepal the organisers of the Gadhimai festival, which is held in Bariyarpur, near the border with India, claimed about five million worshippers came to sacrifice tens of thousands of animals, including buffaloes, goats and birds, as an act of gratitude to the Hindu goddess.

In Israel the belief in being God's Chosen people and living in a place to them by God creates an impregnable sense of self-righteousness. According to a new report on last summer's Gaza war by Amnesty International and Forensic Architecture, there is "strong evidence" of war crimes and possible

crimes against humanity as Israeli forces bombarded residential areas in Rafah in retaliation for the capture of one of its soldiers.

Each time we hear of such actions, the outcomes of 'beliefs', we might do well to reflect on the implications of our beliefs and outcomes we seek here in Beaconsfield.

What is clear from the above examples, and from any simple analysis of orthodox religious beliefs, is that orthodoxy, by definition has an orientation to the past; it defers to the conventional, accepted, traditional, mainstream, standard, approved, established and conformist worldview; a very un-Jesus like worldview. The orthodox position points us backwards; and so blinkers our very sense of vision, it deters us from looking toward tomorrow, yet alone seeking the mystical orientation of eternity echoed in the Scriptures.

Today's readings, although chosen to support the 'All Saints' theme, give us some delightful examples of an unorthodox worldview.

Isaiah provides a vision of a forward looking God:

"the LORD of hosts **will** make for all peoples a feast of rich food....  
And he **will** destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples..... he **will** swallow up death forever. 8 Then the Lord GOD **will** wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he **will** take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken."  
"9 It **will** be said on that day, Lo, this is our God"

Is this the God of our faith, a god of divine unfolding, rather than a God of the past who has done the work of creation?

Isaiah sees God's activity as a process that will be realised, rather than a process that has been realised. And for us, what is our engagement and our participation in the unfolding of divine activity?

The Psalm asks if we will engage Isaiah's vision, it asks if we are ready for the unorthodox orientation that he suggests for us:

“Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord: or who shall stand in his holy place?”

By the time we get to the third reading from the Book of Revelation, we are being encouraged even more into the vision Isaiah has drawn for us for we are given a dream of a new reality:

“a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more..... the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

And the dream is explained:

"See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; 4 he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." And it is an explanation that is a reality that is to be realised: "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end"

In the gospel narrative, the story of Lazarus grounds the dream of revelation into the ordinary and every day setting of human life. Lazarus is the reality of the "*Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end*"; for in his end, his death, is found his beginning, his resurrection; an orientation toward eternity that is more fully underlines in the Easter narrative.

Over the past three weeks I've encountered the very different realities of Perth, Bangkok and Kathmandu; such experiential diversities enable us, enable me, to reflect on 'where am I and where am I going'.

One truth that I delight in is that I don't have to conform to the orthodoxy of 'it's good to be back home'; for I have not been away; rather I have been true to the unfolding journey that takes all of us beyond the confines of our ego-centred geography into a wholeness and oneness

A journey toward that place where we can "be glad and rejoice"; the place in which we "shall receive blessing from the Lord" and hear our own names being called out from the tomb, unbound and let go.

Peter Humphris