

All Saints Sunday Year A  
November 6, 2011  
St. Luke Sheboygan Falls  
Matthew 5:1-12

The Mystery of All Saints

Let us pray. Thank you, Lord for the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us and who surround us and cheer us on as we run life's race. AMEN.

***"Oh, wow, oh, wow, Oh, wow!"***

those were the final words of Apple CEO Steve Jobs before he died. He was looking over the shoulders of his family as he said them. I wonder what he saw.

On Wednesday I attended the funeral for my 92 year old aunt, my mom's only sister, Dorothy. My Cousin Edlyn described her last moments as she gazed out past them. Since she'd had a stroke her words were mostly gibberish except that "God" and "Jesus" were interspersed with what they couldn't make out. I said to her,

who's to say that she didn't see something out ahead of her?

One of the most amazing life to death experiences I have had was when I went to visit a husband and wife who were both dying of cancer. They were on hospice so they had two hospital beds set up in their living room while all their kids attended to them.

As my visit that day was winding to an end, I prayed with the couple standing between their beds with a hand on each of their foreheads the familiar Aaronic Benediction: ***"May the Lord bless you and keep you, may the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious unto you, may the Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace."*** When I was finished the hospice nurse ran up to the husband's bed and checked his vitals. He had died. Some time later, I had a conversation with his

wife who had been a collector of angels. She gave me an angel figurine for my newborn daughter, Rebecca and promised that when she died she would be her guardian angel.

As we celebrate All Saints Day and remember the passing of our loved ones who have passed from this life to the next, we need to acknowledge that not all of us have those incredible stories to tell when a loved one dies. I woke up my second day of seminary, New Testament Greek class to find that my dad had died in the night of a heart attack very suddenly.

When someone we love dies we all grieve and find comfort in different ways. Some find meaning in the thought that God has a plan or a reason for everything that happens. Still others find that would make God out to be cruel—why would God give me cancer at such a young age? Why would

my baby die when people who don't even want kids get pregnant every day?

Myself, I think if God plans every detail in life where is the room for spontaneity and joy? It always makes it makes it too easy to blame every little thing on God who while God can certainly take it when we lash out in anger, but God isn't necessarily the one who deserves it.

There are days when I go to visit my mom like the day my aunt died, when things are just off. Her reaction when I told her was basically, "Why should I care? She never cared about me. She never called me."

My mom has dementia. On a bad day, no amount of explaining that my aunt was 92, she had several strokes and was in a nursing home like her wasn't going to change her attitude that she had been done wrong. If I want to insist that God has some

intricate plan, what is the plan for that?  
Wouldn't it make more sense that Mom  
just go to heaven and be with God too? It  
doesn't seem fair for her to go through all  
this at 91. I get sad and I get angry when I  
think that way.

Then comes a day like yesterday  
where I dread walking through the door.  
Then we have a nice conversation about the  
funeral, about the cousins. Somehow John  
comes up. "He's a good guy," she says.

"I know," I say, "I'm blessed with a  
wonderful husband, three great kids a  
beautiful mother..."

She glances behind her. "Where is  
she?"

"Right there. You're beautiful."

She smiles her little crooked smile.  
"I'm joking." I laugh.

Is it a plan? I don't know. It's a  
mystery—deep and wide. At times it is  
painful and heartbreaking. At other times, it  
all comes together and somehow makes  
sense maybe not rationally, but in our soul  
and our spirit we just know God is at work  
making something out of nothing, creating  
meaning out of an experience that on the  
surface is incomprehensibly horrible. All  
saints means that somehow we are all  
woven into this infinite tapestry that is knit  
together and redeemed by God.

All of you have stories. Stories of  
how your saints have made a difference,  
touched your life, whether you only had to  
hold them in your arms a little while or  
heard them crying out to Jesus after a long,  
full life. Those memories are yours and no  
one else's. They are truly a holy gift from  
God. Jesus is in, with and under those  
reminiscences just as surely and  
mysteriously as he brings the sweet taste of

forgiveness in the bread and wine of the  
Lord's Supper.

Today we gather to remember and  
celebrate those God-filled holy moments as  
best as we as fragile humans are able. Yet,  
on this side of heaven there will be sadness,  
there will be tears, there may even be  
doubt and bitterness. Yet, we come  
together anyway, light the candles and give  
thanks for the time we had and the  
memories of those we love, because we do  
not grieve as people who have no hope. We  
grieve as fellow saints who will see Jesus  
and our beloved saints again. AMEN.