

## Homily November 6, 2022. Mitákuye Oyás'ín

Metok u-ye oh ya-son. Lakota for We are all connected, or all my ancestors.

**Hymn to the ancestors. Sirach 44. A poem of courage and remembrance.**

**Now** allow us to praise famous people and our ancestors, generation by generation.

**The** Lord created great glory, his majesty from eternity.

**They** ruled in their kingdoms, and made a name with their power, some giving counsel by their intelligence; some making pronouncements in prophecies.

**Some** leading the people by their deliberations, and by their understanding of the people's learning, giving wise words in their instruction.

others devising musical melodies, and composing poems;

rich people endowed with strength, living in peace in their dwellings.

**All** of these were honored in their generation, a source of pride in their time.

**Some** of them left behind a name so that their praises might be told.

**For** some there is no memory, and they perished as though they hadn't existed.

**These** have become as though they hadn't been born,

they and even their children after them.

**These** were compassionate people whose righteous deeds haven't been forgotten.

This will persist with their children; their descendants will be a good legacy.

**Their** descendants stand by the covenants, and their children also, for their sake.

**Their** descendants will last forever, and their glory will never be erased.

**Their** bodies were buried in peace, but their name lives for generations.

**The** people will tell of their wisdom, and the congregation will proclaim their praise.

Many of us have been reading and opening our hearts to Celtic Christian practice. John Philip Newell, John O Donohue, Diarmuid O'Murchu, and The Iona community. This week we experienced a significant Celtic Religious contribution.

The period of Halloween, Samhain, and All Soul's Day was called the 'three nights at the end of summer'. Celtic culture divides the year into two halves, a period of light and planting, nurturing, and growth beginning May 1...spring and summer, and on November 1 this 3-day celebration, the preparation of the farm animals, and harvesting crops, marking the beginning of winter's cold, darkness and lethargy.

Celtic ancestors believed that the souls of the faithful departed would return to their family on All Soul's, and great preparation was completed to welcome them. Rituals included sweeping the floor, lighting a good fire, leaving out a bowl of water on the table. Children would go into the neighborhoods 'soul caking' and beg for cakes in exchange for prayers that they would recite for the dead. After lighting candles on the gravesites, Evening prayers for family members that had died were said, candles were left burning, and doors left unlatched.

Celts understood that as Heidegger suggested, humans are the shepherds of the clay, custodians of sacred thresholds.

Celtic peoples historically have a great respect for their ancestors and believe that during this period the boundaries between the living and dead were thin and rituals celebrating this thin time were widespread. The Pre-Christian beliefs centered on

a vulnerability during this transitory time, looking back in remembrance and celebration and looking forward towards winter darkness with anxiety and spiritual preparation. Celtic History suggests that it took several hundred years after contact with early Christians before these traditions became incorporated throughout the Christian world.

Growing up in Southern California where there are limited seasonal changes, I can report that in the 40 or so years I have live in a more northern locale I have increasingly been drawn to the changes in weather, light and dark...

“I have learned things in the dark that I could never have learned in the light, things that have saved my life over and over again, so that there is really only one logical conclusion. I need darkness as much as I need light.”

— Barbara Brown Taylor, Learning to Walk in the Dark

In today's Gospel we hear again the Beatitudes, this passage expresses Luke's understanding of the simplicity of salvation. There is no complication of atonement theories, creeds, or affirmation of faiths. It is a clear guide to expected behavior within a call to belong to a community. Becoming a Christian has expectations...belonging to a community, a radical commitment to share, a life of prayer and discipleship, and a willingness to participate in the breaking of the bread. It is a call in our time to a movement of God's people that is focused on the life and way of Jesus in a community that is connected to its ancestors linked to the stores of God's people. Let us again praise famous people and our ancestors.

During coffee hour I invite you to briefly share your responses to two questions. First to name a personal ancestor that has had influence in your life, why and how. Second, an ancestor that you would want to be added to our Episcopal congregation of Holy Women and Holy Men. I specify Episcopal in that our rules are more expansive for adding individuals we wish to honor. (*Eric Liddell, Enemegahowh, Jonathan Daniels, Dorothy Sayers noted in Lent Madness*)

I am the oldest of 6, coming from a very broken dysfunctional family. I have almost no communication with my 2 living sisters. My mother was a mentally ill suicidal person who was in and out of mental institutions through most of my childhood...my father suffered from PTSD from WWII and enabled all of my mother's disfunction. By the time I was 10 or 11 I was the adult and parent of the household. Linda and I left my family and California in 1974, for the most part to save our lives, marriage, and family. I never looked back; with assistance later from a gifted psychologist I was able to put most of the trauma of my immediate family of origin behind me.

Thankfully I had wonderful Holy Grandparents. They were from the Midwest, Iowa and Missouri, small town, and probably UCC or Methodist. My grandmother, Cherokee, English and Scottish, was the Martha, a practical Nurse, she always enough to feed the 5000, her table open to anyone who showed up. Loved God, sang spirituals when she did the housework.... she was the second person after myself that recognized that my cousin was gay and protected him from his parents and spoke daily to her oldest son who died at the age of 3 from pneumonia.

My grandfather was Scots-Irish protestant...wore orange on St Patrick's day. His father and uncles were officers in the union army. He taught me to how to fish, how to read the paper and engage in long discussions on world events or democratic politics, was friends with every fisherman on the pier regardless of race, culture or language. It was amazing how he explained fishing techniques to non-English speaking people. Stored the Irish Whiskey under the sink not to annoy my aunt, his southern Baptist daughter.

When Linda and I moved in together in 1969, they were our only supporters. They never complained about my long hair or being a draft resister Conscientious Objector. They supported my brother when he married a Mexican woman, my sister a African American man ten years her senior.

They are my saints, they taught me unconditional love, I speak with them often.

This past week we saw the amazing film Till. The story of Emmitt Till's torture and lynching, and more importantly the raising up of a modern saint, Mamie Elizabeth Till-Mobley, Emmitt Till's mother. Her determination and courage to move the body of her son to Chicago for his funeral in an open casket open for mourners to see, to encourage the news to publish his brutalized face for the world to see. Her risky decision to sit through the mockery of a trial in Mississippi.

The film is amazing in that there is very little violence if any by modern standards. that the roles and dialogue of white people are very limited. This is a story of faith and determination. It is a story of a committed mother, and her supportive family in Mississippi and Chicago.

After the murder of her son, and the heroic acts during his funeral and the trial of his murder's, she became an activist force of nature, a force that only could have been guided by the Holy Spirit. She worked closely with the NAACP, completed her BA and MA, taught school for 23 years, advocated for children living in poverty,

In the forward to Mamie's biography, *Death of Innocence*, Jesse Jackson writes: *God chooses ordinary people to do extraordinary things when they honor His will and His way. God has the last answer. Even death cannot stop God. Mamie turned a crucifixion into a resurrection. Well Done, you awakened the world. Well Done, you gave your son so a nation might be saved. Well Done.*

*You see, my story is more than the story of a lynching. It is more than the story of how, with God's guidance, I made a commitment to rip the covers off Mississippi, USA-revealing to the world the horrible face of race hatred. It is more than the story of how I took the privacy of my own grief and turned it into a public issue, a political issue, one which set in motion the dynamic force that led ultimately to a generation of social and legal progress for this country.*

*My story is more than all of that. It is the story of how I was able to pull myself back from the brink of desolation and turn my life around by digging deep within my soul to pull hope from despair, joy from anguish, forgiveness from anger, love from hate. I want people to know about all of that and how they might gain some useful understanding for their own lives from my experience.*

*I didn't see right away, but there was an important mission for me, to shape so many other young minds as a teacher, a messenger, an active church member. God told me, "I took away one child, but I will give you thousands." He has. And I have been grateful for that blessing. Death of Innocence by Mamie Elizabeth Till-Mobley*

Let us pray now for our ancestors. Blessings for those that were honored in their generation and in our memories and prayers for those for those who perished as though they had not existed. Blessings for those that brought us light, and prayers for those that brought us darkness. At Saint John's we value courage. Holy one give us courage and wisdom to both praise and to forgive our ancestors, following where the spirit leads us towards justice, healing and transformation.

Great God of bounty and provider in lean times, protector from evil and hope of new light and life, we thank you for all those who before us have believed in the Jesus and walked in His ways. We praise you that with them we are part of the fellowship of all saints, past and present. Teach us to follow their examples of faithfulness and service, and to trust You through all the dark, cold days to bring us through to light and new life. In the name of the One who transforms all life, Jesus, Amen. *(Prayer from Iona community)*