

Once in a while, I'll be going through my normal day, and out of the blue comes a thought about someone I've known in the past who has died. It might be a thought connected to one of my parents who both died about 10 years ago. Or it might be about Michael, a friend of mine who died of cancer about 30 years ago. When that happens, I like to imagine that the person has popped in again to remind me they are still hanging around. Now some would chalk that up to an over-active imagination on my part. Others might suggest that that is akin to hearing voices, and warn me that I may be slipping into some sort of psychosis, or that I'm losing touch with reality in some other way.

But as far back as we can determine in human history, almost every culture and religion has had some way of describing the connection people have with those who have died. The connection is not usually explained in a logical, rational way. Rather, it is described through symbol, and ritual, and story-telling, and imagination. When someone dies, it prevents us from being connected to them the way we always have been. But our human history and experience seem to tell us that death does not destroy the connection. We simply find different ways of being connected to those who have died.

All Saints Day and All Souls Day (or Dia de los Muertos in the Mexican tradition) is a way we Catholics acknowledge our connection with those who have died. We celebrate the Communion of Saints, a statement of faith that says that all of us, living and dead, are united in the love of God. We cannot describe that connection exactly, but our scriptures, prayers, rituals, and gut-level knowing all proclaim it.

In this modern, scientific minded, rational/logical world, this belief may strike some as ridiculous, archaic, silly, and superstitious. But our world today could use a good dose of this "irrational" thinking. Death definitely separates us from each other, but we can make a long list of other things which we allow to separate us. In this election year, politics comes quickly to mind. But there are many other things also, like race, economic status, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, legal status, etc. We use these things to point out how we are different from others. Then we proclaim that because of this, we have no connection to each other, and sometimes treat others as if they don't exist or shouldn't exist. Talk about irrational thinking!

If our faith tells us that death cannot disconnect us from each other, maybe it can help us realize that nothing else can disconnect us either. Our faith may, however, need a boost from our work/experience. For example, if I work to hear, understand, and recognize how another person's hopes/dreams/pains/happiness are very much like my own, it will be easier for me to believe that we are very much connected at a very deep level. It will then be more difficult to ignore or distance from others, despite our differences.

We are all one as the Body of Christ. Our polarized, hurting world is sorely in need of hearing that message. Our trust/faith in that fact is what we followers of Jesus can offer the world for its healing.

Fr. Garry