

Our 37-year old daughter Hannah is the Executive Director of an 1800-student public charter school, located near the airport in Columbus, Ohio. She is a remarkable educator, but not just at the school. At the conclusion of nearly every Powell family gathering... be it for a week-end or a week together...she is known to ask of us all: "What was your favorite part?" or "What did you like best?" Sometimes, experiencing the fatigue at the conclusion of a family vacation, someone will respond: "Oh, come on Hannah!"

Well, upon coming to the conclusion of reading the entire Bible, if Hannah [or anyone else] were to ask me "What was your favorite part?", our Second Lesson this morning would rank very near the top of my list. The words are simply remarkable. The promises made are nearly unimaginable. The eternal life herein described exceeds my expectations and imagination.

As we are brought by God to worship on this Festival of All Saints... an emotional day, for sure...I'm drawn to some of the ludicrous statements we have coined related to the natural human act of crying. Taking advantage of my 65 years of life, I recall the 1964 song sung by Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons, '*Big girls, don't cry...they don't cry*'. I think of the number of times I've heard people say, usually fathers to their sons: '*Don't cry! Be a man about it!*' I have countless times witnessed people crying, only to hear them struggle to say: '*I'm so sorry. I so didn't want to cry!*'

For goodness sake, crying is not some bruise on our social etiquette. Crying is no social faux pas for which we need to be embarrassed nor criticized. In our OT lesson we read: '*The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces.*' [Is. 25:8] In our Epistle Lesson God promises that '*He will wipe every tear from their eyes.*' [Rev. 21:4] In our Gospel Lesson, Mary...the sister grieving over the death of her brother...and Jesus, also grieving his friend's death...are both

brought to tears by the death of a loved one. Crying is as natural as laughing and, unless my 'bet'---based upon my experience with All Saints' Day---proves mistaken, there will be more than one tear shed during our worship this morning...tears of joy, tears of loss, tears of grief, tears of gratitude. No apologies needed or expected!

Human life is painful. At birth, one of our first human acts is to cry. Human life is not for the timid. Human life is never exempt from suffering and grief and loss. Believing in and following Jesus, despite the unbiblical blather I've heard from television preachers over the years, does not insulate nor exempt us from the emotions of daily human life...human joy and human sadness. To live is to love and with love comes loss. Consider the saying: *Better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all.*

The Christian faith...being baptized in the very family of the Almighty God...being pronounced a brother or sister of Jesus, the only Begotten Son of God...does not numb us to human emotion. I actually believe, for this continues to be my experience, that being a member of God's family actually expands, it extends our potential for loss and joy and sadness and triumph.

St. Paul reminds us that when one part of *'the body suffers, the whole body suffers. When one part of the body rejoices, the whole body rejoices.'* [1 Cor. 12: 26] I wouldn't trade in that experience for anything, for it is in our relationships that we experience authentic emotions. It is in these past 31+ years of life and ministry together that you have afforded me the privilege of deep joy, as well as deep sadness. I will forever be grateful for these gifts you've given me!

On this Festival of All Saints, we are promised that in the eternal life Jesus has won...and God promises to all who live and die believing... the only tears that we might shed will be those resulting from unimaginable joy. On that first Easter morning God, by raising his crucified Son, conquered and destroyed the most formidable cause

of human tears...death itself. The death of a loved one has brought people to tears since God introduced love and humans began to experience loss.

But, the time is coming when only love will remain and loss will be forever eliminated. The time is coming when God will say to all the saints who have passed from this life, precisely what Jesus said to his deceased friend Lazarus, namely: "Come out!" and the dead will certainly obey. And, when the faithful dead have been raised, *'God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.* **SAY IT TOGETHER: *Death is gone for good---tears gone, crying gone, pain gone--all the first order of things is gone.***' [The Message/ Rev. 21: 3-4]

That's one of my favorite verses in the Bible! It has been for a long, long time and...I anticipate...will be for a long time to come. In this litany of promises, the joys of this life are maximized. In these promises we are able to face the pain and suffering of this life...we can endure the losses of this life...not because they are minimized... not because 'big girls' or 'little boys' are told not to cry... but because God has conquered sin, death, and the devil. This divine-declaration can bring me to tears everytime! No apologies!

Amen.