

November 2 – Feast of All Souls
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Wisdom 3:1-9	Those who trust in him shall understand truth, and the faithful shall abide with him in love because grace and mercy are with his holy ones, and his care is with his elect.
Romans 6:3-9	We were indeed buried with him ... so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life
John 6:37-40	This is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him on the last day.

In recent months, U.S. newspapers have been full of analysis and commentary on the financial crisis which started in the United States but has since rocked money markets around the world. In China, the scandals of children’s toys painted with lead paint and of tainted pet food and toothpaste were pushed off the front pages by the Beijing Olympics only to have a new scandal arise with the use of industrial chemicals to contaminate milk powder for infants.

The whole world has read and wondered about these most blatant failures of societies to protect their citizens, but on a smaller scale similar abuses regularly take place in other countries where the international press takes no notice. For example, in Cambodia the government has routinely sold university buildings, a police station, a stadium, and other public buildings — even an urban lake — to developer friends who then build replacement facilities far away from the people in undesirable locations.

In the United States, both presidential candidates have noted that greed, an uncontrolled desire for greater profits, and inadequate regulation led many U.S. financial institutions to make risky and unsound decisions with repercussions that have spread throughout the global economy. In China, the dynamics were much the same. The Beijing government encouraged the development of a first-world economy to enhance China’s political and economic status but tried to oversee it with a developing-world regulatory system that is totally inadequate. In Cambodia, an unhealthy cooperation between government officials and business tycoons — sometimes they are the same people — basically allowed business to do what it wants.

In these countries, and in so many others, the right of the private sector to make money and increase profits has taken precedence over the right of all people to have access to the basic necessities of life, to food, health care, adequate housing, and basic education. Corporations have tremendous power and influence, and they wield them skillfully, often to the detriment of the common people.

Some business leaders and government officials are simply greedy and corrupt. Others may be blindly following an economic model or theory without acknowledging the suffering and dire economic consequences for their people. The end result is the same.

What does this have to do with All Souls Day? One of the themes of John’s gospel is the care Jesus voiced for his disciples, his followers. He wished eternal life for them:

Jesus prayed to his Father: “When I was with them I protected them in your name ... and I guarded them, and none of them was lost except the son of destruction, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled.” (John 17:12)

In describing himself as the Good Shepherd, Jesus said: “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand.” (John 10:27-28)

When he is arrested in the garden, Jesus protects his disciples: “If you are looking for me, let these men go.... This was to fulfill what he had said, ‘I have not lost any of those you gave me.’” (John 12:38, 13:18, 15:25)

And in today’s gospel, Jesus says: “This is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it on the last day. This is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him on the last day.” (John 6:38-40)

Today we celebrate and remember those who saw the Son present in their lives and believed in him, and died holding on to that faith. Now they await the fullness of eternal life that Jesus promised. They kept the faith and are a model for us. They are an encouragement for us to persevere in our own following of Jesus.

Those we remember on All Souls Day are certain of eternal life, but for Jesus eternal life is not just an ultimate future reward. Rather it is a full communion of God and his people. And for Jesus, eternal life begins here and now. Jesus said, again in John’s gospel: “This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3) The reign of God is to be established now and then continue without end.

Eternal life is knowing God, intimately and personally; but knowing God, loving God, means loving others also, loving our neighbors as ourselves. How do we help our brothers and sisters in our own city, in our own country, but also throughout the world to begin to experience the loving relationships of friendship, sharing, and trust that are the beginnings of eternal life, the signs of eternal life present in our world?

There are many issues that will influence our vote this week: the crisis in the financial markets, abortion, health care and insurance for all, education, foreign relations, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and a host of others. Any one issue could cause us to choose one candidate over another. But in this time of choice, it is important that we look not only at a single issue but at the big picture. Which candidates best understand and will act upon the values of Jesus to establish the reign of God in our own day and time? Which candidates will best help us to experience the beginnings of eternal life here and now?

For more information: Read more about the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions in “Loving our neighbor in a shrinking world.” Through this resource, Maryknoll missionaries encourage voters in the 2008 elections to scrutinize candidates’ policy proposals through the lens of those who, both in the U.S. and overseas, lack basic necessities, endure the scourge of racism, live with gender-based discrimination or feel the immediate impact of climate change. Email (ogc@maryknoll.org) for a copy, or find the election guide here: www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm

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