

*I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.*

These are some of the words from Abraham Lincoln's first Inaugural Address. It is the first use of the famous phrase, "the better angels of our nature." It seems that Abraham Lincoln knew a thing or two about not only our anthropology but, perhaps, a little of the observance of All Saints' Day.

All Saints' Day was observed by the Church yesterday, November 1. We will observe All Saints' this Sunday, November 4. In part, we observe the day by remembering those loved ones who have died in the past year or those whom we remember from years before. The video of the saints in the section below is akin to this type of remembrance. All who have gone before us make up what the tradition refers to as the saints triumphant. We--the saints militant--continue our course on earth until by God's grace we are, as the Prayer Book notes, reunited with those who have gone before. What this looks like? I have no clue. What the promise means? I believe such a vision underscores that there is no place that God is not, thus we are never separated from the divine.

And never separated from the ones whom we love who, likewise, live in God in life and rest in the holy upon death. Indeed, we no longer see those loved ones and engage with them in the ways that we did during this earthly pilgrimage. However, we continue to live with memories, sensory awareness, flashes, and emotions that bring them back in real time. The mortal coil may be cut. The relational reality continues. The Church, then, is the mystical body of the Christ throughout time. Not just St. Francis gathered on a Sunday, but the worshipping communities of God across both space and time. It is sort of like the final scene from *Places in the Heart*. As critic Roger Ebert wrote, "It [the final scene] is a dreamy, idealistic fantasy in which all the characters in the film -- friends and enemies, wives and mistresses, living and dead, black and white -- take communion together at a church service. This is a scene of great vision and power. . . ." And such a vision is nothing less than moving.

While the All Saints' remembrances of loved ones are key, there is another aspect to the Sunday that arises, and this brings us back to Abraham Lincoln's *better angels of our nature*. As surely as the saints enumerated in the video in the next section inspire us, the saints throughout time have offered a physical and tangible vision of what living in God means. They are heroes and heroines who exemplified what is right and good and just. They are models, as is Jesus, of the

godly life. And they remind us of the dangers inherent in living a life that seeks justice and peace in our time. Indeed, many of the saints were martyrs.

However, Lincoln's use of the term *better angels of our nature* implies that there are also--and at the same time--lesser angels of our nature. Lincoln knew his Bible, and he certainly knew the apostle Paul, who also describes a similar anthropology. We are at war within ourselves at times between the good and that which is not good, between that which gives life and that which destroys life, between beauty and horror, between love and hate. While we encourage and hope that the better angels will manifest themselves in our thoughts, words, and deeds, we must also be aware that the lesser angels are always there with the potential to rear their ugly heads.

Far from a depressing understanding of our makeup, I find this anthropology refreshingly honest. Again, such an understanding does not mean that we wallow in self-pity. It does, however, force us to be self-aware and recognize our potential for great goodness as well as our capacity for great cruelty or corruption. All Saints, from this perspective, allows us to recommit ourselves to living more fully into who it is that God has created us to be, while also confessing those times (and the times that will come) where we fall short of the ideal. Our solidarity, then, is in some ways precisely with those with whom we disagree or despise. Friends and enemies, wives and mistresses, living and dead, black and white as Ebert noted. And this solidarity softens our hardness toward the other with whom we may disagree. They no longer can be mortal enemy. We don't need to agree with them. We don't need to destroy them. I think this, in part, was what Lincoln was getting at. Surely, the period he governed was rife with not understanding this truth.

Thus, may our All Saints offer a vision of our loved ones, our selves, and those different from us that yet again encourages the better angels of our nature and reminds us that the table of God is, truly, welcoming of all.