

# Sermons at Saint Paul's

*Creating Peace through Spiritual Nourishment and Service in the World*

The Eve of All Souls/November 1, 2015

The Reverend E. Clifford Cutler

Philadelphia celebrated a day of kindness on Tuesday as a response to the awarding of the Liberty Medal to the Dalai Lama. The next day's report in the newspaper showed a photograph of a street musician playing his saxophone. Behind him was a sign that said: "Love is who you are. Ego is who you think you are."

On this eve of All Souls we recall with thanks and beauty those we have loved, and those others have loved, who are now with God in all of God's love. Love is who they are. We can infer from that that love is who we are. We are not what we think. And God who is love itself unites us to himself, with an almost magnetic attraction, now and always. Whether we live or die, as we say in the burial office, we are possessed by God.

My last church had a wooden 16<sup>th</sup> century alms box. Carved into the box all around were flames and the faces of people. All Souls Day was linked to the Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory and the payment of money to assist the release of people to heaven. This collection box with its flames and faces is what drove Martin Luther crazy and sparked the Reformation.

Love is who you are. Ego is who you think you are. Ego judges. Love embraces. Ego exacts payment. Love welcomes.

Wisdom teaches that the souls of the righteous – and righteous is a relationship word – are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. They are with God in all of God's love. Love is stronger than death. Mercy is greater than any judgment.

The psalm says much the same thing from another perspective. "If thou, Lord, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss; O Lord, who may abide it?"

For there is mercy with thee.... My soul fleeth unto the Lord; before the morning watch, I say, before the morning watch." Ego convicts. Love sets free. Ego is who we think we are. Love is who we essentially are.

The Gospel says, "those who hear will live." This is apropos tonight because music is aural. It is heard. Duruflé also believed that music had a sacramental quality. It allowed for hearing of grace and truth, for the passage of a kind of light. Those who hear will live. Duruflé finished his Requiem in 1947 three years after the liberation of Paris from Nazi occupation. He told his wife that while writing the Requiem he was sometimes brought to tears by its melodies. Despite the devastation of the war there was still beauty in the world. Those who hear this will live.

By the end of his life (Duruflé died in 1986) he had wished he had written more music. His wife thought he had been too severe with himself. His severity and perfectionism were an impediment to his creative expression. One might say ego is severe and constricts. Love is kind and aspires.

Surprisingly, and contrary to its Medieval practice, All Souls is a day of kindness. In life or death we belong to God who is love. Those souls who are with God have something to teach us. They know what we can only now glimpse. They experience fully only what we can faintly hear. They know what we can only hint at through music. That death is swallowed up by love's victory. That in spite of war beauty prevails. That severity is swallowed up by self-compassion. Judgmentalness swallowed up by mercy, condemnation by a freeing welcome.

The saxophonist's sign says it all. Love is who you are; ego is who you think you are. Judgmental thoughts, condemning opinions, severe evaluations, war zones and death are not who we are. We are love. Love is life's meaning. Love is life's goal. All the souls rest in the open hand of God in whose presence is love. Those who hear will live.

*Amen.*