



ALL SAINTS CHURCH
PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

And God Smiles

A Sermon by The Most Reverend Desmond Tutu¹
Archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa
November 6, 2005 – All Saints Day Sunday

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

How wonderful to be back here in this quite extraordinary parish. A few years ago somebody sent me a photograph. They must have been trying to tell me something; I don't know what. It was a photograph of a church, and outside the church there was a huge billboard. The sign read, "Have trouble sleeping? Let a church help. Try our sermons." I hope you won't be feeling too much that way.

It is a wonderful, wonderful thing to be back in this quite remarkable parish church with all these beautiful people. We are part of an extraordinary act of worship led so splendidly by the orchestra and the choir.² Aren't they fantastic? I think we should give them our applause. [Applause]

I can't quite understand you. I was part of this movement in South Africa, when we were struggling against the viciousness of *apartheid*. I very well understand how you could, under the inspiring leadership of George Regas, come to support us in the way that you did. You prayed for us; you loved us; and you gave support in tangible other ways. Now here we are: free. It has been eleven years now, you know, that we have been free. It is a fantastic thing to be able, eleven years down the line, to come to fantastic places such as this one and say, "Thank you for having helped us to become free."

About this time in the sermon, I would say, "I would like to applaud you;" but somebody would then say, "We did think there was a screw loose in that guy's head. He wants to applaud us all by himself." I made a wonderful discovery. I discovered that I had a magic wand. When I wave it over people, it has the extraordinary power of turning them into instant South Africans. So I wave my wand over you, and now I can say, "Fellow South Africans, let's give these Americans a real humdinger!" OK? [Applause]

That must seem to you to be histrionics, almost play acting. But I want you to know that it is for real. It is trying to express what is almost inexpressible. Only those who have been unfree would know the exhilaration, the excitement when one has been unfree and then one is free. You can't contain yourself! When you meet a person who helped remove the shackles from your wrists and your ankles, yes, you become exuberant. You want to be able

to express the joy and the thankfulness of someone like the mother who came to our Commission and said, "Please, can you help us? Please, can't you just give me a bone of my son, so I could give him a decent burial? Of people who would be able to know where their loved ones who disappeared were buried. I wish I would be able to convey to you the depth of their deep, deep, deep gratitude.

So, thank you. Thank you.

I want to be very careful I don't do what I did once with a group of young people in Australia. I said, "The trouble with most of us is that we don't celebrate who we are! So come on, let's just give ourselves thunderous applause to celebrate who we are!" And they did. When they finished, I said, "How about giving God a standing ovation?" And they took the roof off. Near the end of that, without thinking, I said, "Thank you."

One could have expected that you would have said, "Yes, we have helped you to achieve the splendid goal of your glorious liberation, your move from repression and injustice to democracy and freedom. And then you would say, now we have to go and deal with other worthy causes. But you haven't. And there are so many worthy causes. Under the equally inspiring leadership of the redoubtable Ed Bacon, who tends to get arrested on Ash Wednesday,³ you have continued to walk with us, supporting with your prayers and your love and your wherewithal a ministry and witness that you thought just might need support. Part of the incredible generosity that we have received from the people at All Saints includes the warm hospitality that we have received so that we could go and relax in a beach house. Thank you!

One would have thought that you would have said that that was quite enough, but you said, "No, we want to have a visible reminder of our connection with you people in South Africa." So you brought Wilma here.⁴ [Laughter and applause] She was the first woman I ordained to the priesthood, and a little later I appointed her to be my chaplain, making her the first woman to be a chaplain to an Archbishop. So you've really got the cat's whiskers here.

Thank you, thank you.

Very soon, at this Eucharist, we will get to the consecration prayer. At the end of the consecration prayer, almost as if to say, "The risen, ascended, glorified Christ, present sacramentally, is the Christ who says to us—for at that point in the Eucharist we are bidden to pray. We are bold to pray as our Lord taught us to pray, "Our Father . . ." It is almost as if we have been transported to the resurrection garden, when our Lord encountered Mary Magdalene, and uttered quite extraordinary and unexpected words to her. He said, "Go and tell." He sent her there to those men; one of whom betrayed him; another denied him, despite warnings – not once but three times; and then all of them abandoned him, and fled as he was arrested in the garden. He is speaking about these men, and he said some extraordinary words. Had I been in his shoes, I would have given them the mother and father of tongue lashings that they would not ever forget. That is what they deserved, those so-and-so's. But Jesus said to Mary, "Go and tell." He doesn't say, "Go and tell my disciples." Nor does he say, "Go and tell my friends," which would have been incredibly magnanimous of him. He said something that is quite breathtaking, "Go and tell my brothers." "Go and tell my brothers that I am ascending to my God and their God, to my father and their father." Ha!

Quite frequently, I think, we tend to say, “Our father’? Addressing God as our father? That’s nice.” It makes us a little sentimental. But in my decrepitude of 74 years now, I reckon the words that Jesus said to Mary Magdalene are some of his most critical words, if not his most radical. For in that, Jesus is saying, “Hey, do you know something? You are family. You are the human family, God’s family.” You and I, knowing ourselves to be the awful sinners that we are, are given the incredible privilege of addressing God – the all holy God, the omnipotent God, the God who dwells in light unapproachable, from whom the angels and archangels veil their sight, they can’t bear the glory of God as they worship and adore God ceaselessly, crying “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts – and you and I are able to say to this one, “Abba, abba.” We are meant to have the intimacy of a little child.

This family has no outsiders. Everyone is an insider. When Jesus said, “I, if I am lifted up, will draw . . .” Did he say, “I will draw some”? “I will draw some, and tough luck for the others”? He said, “I, if I be lifted up, will draw *all*.” All! All! All! – Black, white, yellow; rich, poor; clever, not so clever; beautiful, not so beautiful. All! All! It is radical. All! Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, Bush – all! All! All are to be held in this incredible embrace. Gay, lesbian, so-called “straight;” all! All! All are to be held in the incredible embrace of the love that won’t let us go.

Isn’t it desperately sad that, at a time when we face formidable problems – poverty, HIV/AIDS, conflict – that the Anglican Communion can invest so much energy on disagreements about human sexuality? A communion that used to boast that one of its distinctive characteristics was something called comprehensiveness, that our communion, the Anglican Church, included just about everybody. Even if you had the most weird theology you could come in, you were allowed. And now we, who used to be held up in admiration by many because of this inclusiveness, are now spending time working out how we can excommunicate one another. God looks on and God weeps. *God weeps*.

But we are family. You know that in families you don’t choose who is going to be your relative. How frequently we wish we could choose! But in family we are God’s gift to one another. We are God’s gift, *all of us*, to one another.

In family there is the ethic of family: from each according to their ability; to each according to their need. We don’t say, “Baby, what have you contributed to the budget of this house?” Baby has contributed precious little – sometimes perhaps strange smells; often waking you up in the middle of the night. But into this bundle you pour all your love, in a healthy family. You don’t say, “Sorry, you are going to get in proportion to what you contribute.”

If that is so, how in the name of everything that is good can we continue spending obscene amounts on what we call “defense” budgets – which are really budgets of death and destruction – when we know that just a minute fraction of those budgets would ensure that all our sisters and brothers would have enough clean water to drink, would have enough food to eat. One billion people go to bed with no food, and we can’t feed them! We can’t ensure that everyone has affordable, adequate health care, that they can have a good education, that they can have a decent home. And God looks on and God weeps. God weeps! And God says, “What in the name of everything that is good ever got into me to create that lot?”

But then God looks and sees All Saints Church. He sees family! Did you notice? A smile breaks over the face of God, and a little angel goes up and wipes the tear from God's eye. God says, "Hey, have you seen them? Just look at how they carry out those ministries of caring. They have vindicated me. Yes! I meant for them to be compassionate and caring. I meant for them to be gentle and sharing. I meant for them to wipe the tears from others. Yes, they have justified me," says God. And God smiles.

All of you here are saying, "Yes, God has meant that this world should be a better world. It ought to be a world where we live amicably together, a world where there is greater joy, where there is more laughter, more caring, more sharing. And God says, "Hey, aren't they neat?" And God smiles.

¹ From the entry for "Desmond Tutu" in *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desmond_Tutu):

Desmond Mpilo Tutu (born October 7, 1931) is a South African cleric and activist who rose to worldwide fame during the 1980s as an opponent of apartheid. Tutu was the first black South African Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa, and primate of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984.

The *Wikipedia* entry continues with a more complete biography and links to other sources of information. For a picture of his activities post retirement, see the Newsweek Magazine/MSNBC.com interview at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6769668/site/newsweek/>.

² The Sunday of this sermon was All Saints Day Sunday, the feast day for this parish. The usual choir was augmented with an orchestra and was performing the Gabriel Favre *Requiem Mass* during the service.

³ See Ed Bacon's Ash Wednesday sermon delivered March 5, 2003, "From Ashes to Blessings," available online at the All Saints Church Website, [http://www.allsaints-pas.org/archives/sermons/\(3-5-03%20Ash%20Wed\)%20From%20Ashes%20to%20Blessings.pdf](http://www.allsaints-pas.org/archives/sermons/(3-5-03%20Ash%20Wed)%20From%20Ashes%20to%20Blessings.pdf), and in hardcopy from All Saints Church's transcript ministry.

⁴ The Rev. Wilma Jakobsen, a native of South Africa, joined the staff of All Saints Church in 2003 as Senior Associate for Peace & Justice and Liturgy.