

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

My maternal grandfather died on March 22, 1967. It was a Wednesday. We lived with my grandparents in a two family house in Deer Park, on New York's Long Island. I was in high school. My grandmother came upstairs to tell us that she discovered my grandfather sitting motionless in his chair. Though she never uttered the words, the tone in her voice betrayed the fact that knew he had died. He had put in a full day's work as a house painter, washed up, enjoyed his dinner and then after dinner, retired to his favorite chair to smoke his pipe and read the paper. His name was Gustav. Gustav Adolf Kollem. I called him Opa.

For all intents and purposes that was a lifetime ago, but I remember the day as if it was yesterday. I'm sure those who knew and loved Vicki Cafferelli, Hazel Fisher, El Searles, Ibrahim Ayad, Ann Gross, Bud Yuhl, David Lehde, Dotty Harmon, Stacy Micoli and all we name on this All Saints' Day will forever remember the day their loved one joined all the saints in light.

A couple of days afterward, my grandmother, who was one of the most superstitious people I've ever known and who had a saying or a remedy or a legend or some piece of folklore to accompany any aspect of life or death, gave the instruction that we should open a window so as to let his spirit go from the house.

It wasn't so much that she was ready to let him go as it was the acknowledgement that he really had died, that it wasn't just some bad dream from which she hoped to awaken. He was dead and she was ready to let God have him back.

*32When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." 33When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35Jesus began to weep. 36So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 38Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." 40Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" 41So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." 43When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."*

“Unbind him,” Jesus said, “and let him go.” Unbind him from the strips of cloth that were meant to hold his broken, diseased body together. Unbind him from the trappings of death, the cloth that was lovingly wrapped around his body by those who loved him before they laid him in his tomb for the rest of time. Unbind him from death, free him from his fate, for up to this point, from the moment he was born, he was bound to die, a slave to a master who only lends us the tools of our time and our days, only to ask for them back once our work is done. “Unbind him,”

Jesus commanded, at least for the time being, because as you know, Lazarus does die, we're not told when, but he does. So he was not resurrected, but merely resuscitated, brought back to life, but only to die again.

That's when it dawned on me what my grandmother was doing, 42 years ago now. Hers was the same command. "Unbind him," she commanded, open the window, and unbind him not from death, but from life, unbind him from his work, his toil, his disappointments. Free him from his temporary master, the one who merely lends us time, to the true Master, who rules it, who from the very beginning created him and in whose hands all of it rests, and rests eternally. Unbind him from this life, so that he may have the life God intended him to have for all eternity.

We celebrate All Saints' Sunday today and if we could attach a non-liturgical gesture to the day, we would open the window. Today we pause to read the names of those who died since last All Saint's Sunday. We recall their names to the gathered community to remember them, to remember how Ann and Dotty and Stacy and Maureen sang so beautifully with our choirs for all those years, how Linda Brackett loved this church and always had a kind word no matter what her circumstance, how Vicki always loved to see you, how Bud giggled, how gentle and kind Ibrahim was, how Elwood cherished his friends, how Tim and Ellen lived for others, and how Cliff was always deliberate and conscientious, how Hazel loved her Lord, how David and Pat and Stacy fought their illness with courage and grace, how Eric and Marge and Anna and Ruth lived for their families, and how Don loved sports with a passion I'll never understand.

And while we'll remember them in our minds and through our tears, the day is not about bringing them back, but letting them go, to live the life God promised them on the day they were baptized. On that day, they were given the promise they inherited this past year, the promise that Isaiah and St. John spoke of when they wrote down their visions. Isaiah, using the language that held the most weight among a nomadic and oppressed people, speaks of a banquet held in God's presence, with a menu that you would reserve for only the best of days, and John speaks of that New Land, where pain and suffering do not exist, and God himself will be the one to walk into your room at night after you've had the worst of days, and will sit by your side and dry your tears and tell you stories of grace and comfort until, reassured by his touch and his words, you fall quietly to sleep.

Let us pray...As the leaves fall and the grasses cease to grow, as the wind grows cold and the scent in the air is no longer that of summer, so the earth prepares to sleep holding the promise of a new life to emerge on the other side or winter. The earth abides and holds tight to the promise that in the seed the whole plant exists, in the stem and root and bud, the leaf and flower reside and will return to bloom and feel the sun and create beauty and create the next harvest. May such faith be ours in this time of waiting, O Lord. Until we open our eyes in your eternal Kingdom, O God, and share the same promise that those whom we love have already redeemed, grant us a quiet and strong faith to rest securely in the knowledge that until that day, we reside in your kingdom and rest securely in the palm of your hand.

Amen.