

Last week I was blessed to attend a conference for Episcopal clergy called CREDO,
A time to consider wellness, in every form, for ministry, in the long-run
Some have noticed that I got a little sun; indeed, we met at a church camp on Mobile Bay.
We drove through fields of cotton, groves of pecans to arrive at the camp,
 between Pensacola and Mobile.

And all week, I was attracted to the benches by the bay like a child to Halloween candy.
There was a pier that ran out into the bay, where we had some of our small group conversations.
Sometimes, the baitfish would school around us and then life would swirl:
Terns and great pelicans would dive into the water from the air; cormorants from the surface;
And dolphins would appear, snorting through their blowholes as they herded the fish into the
shallows and feasted.
It was so beautiful to sit at the end of the pier and be surrounded by their calls and agility.
Life in wonder, actions, and bright relief was all around; a balm to my soul.

As the week went on, I realized that it was also a slaughter;
the feathered predators growing fuller with each dive;
dolphins adding to their own muscle as they ate voraciously
the little fish losing their lives, quite unwillingly, for the sake of others.
Sometimes you could see them leap out of the water in a last,
 desperate attempt to avoid a dolphin's gullet.

The ecology of the bay reminded me that life, in every natural realm, has its costs.
The logic of the cross, of the Gospel is built into the Creation.
Things are given for the sake of others and things are taken for one's own sake as well.
There is no community, no communion without gift, without sacrifice.
Your marriage is less than it should be if it does not include mutual sacrifice.
Your working situation is less than it should be if costly gifts are not surrendered for the mutual
good.
Our society is less than it is meant to be, if some always get their way and if some are always
expected to sacrifice their just aspirations.
The sacrifice of Jesus' death is meant to be apparent in all of our living and relating.

But that is where the analogy from Mobile Bay runs out;
The little fish, you see, never eat the pelicans.
The dolphins never give up their position at the top of the food chain for the sake of others.
The beautiful bay is also brutal hierarchy, rigid and unredeemed.
It is just the kind of broken system that Jesus came to upend and make new.
His death and resurrection were the beginning of a new creation;
His sacrifice has ended the world in which sacrifice was forcefully required of others
And made a world in which we are gathered, in many communities, to mutually give of our being
for each other and for a good greater than any of us can discern on our own.
The church, the body of Christ, is meant to be the foremost example of such a community of
mutual gift, which will one day be the Kingdom of God.

The saints we remember this day are those who came to that new consciousness,
Who have not only gathered, collected, and retained but learned to give,
Even to embrace the hungry, the weeping, and the poor
The saints have learned to share the shallower consolations of wealth and creature comforts with
those of deeper need, to make visible Christ's new community of love.
Because we know that gifts that are received and gripped tightly are often lost in the process;
They are crushed by the tightness of our grip; they rot and decrease as they are hoarded.
Those shared are frequently multiplied, extended, and made new for succeeding generations.

I have a friend, a lawyer, who does wills and trusts.
He says that right many of his clients begin their planning process by saying, "if something happens to me..."
He usually says, "Well, something is going to happen you. You are going to die!"
We will remember at the Altar, in a moment, all the members of our parish who have died since
last All Saints-tide and others who you have asked to be remembered.
And one day, we will be remembered there.
Persist in the church, in this common life of mutual sacrifice,
Persist in the beauty of the Gospel life,
and we will count you a member of the Communion of Saints.
We will say it with a straighter face and an easier smile
if your life has been marked by giving and listening,
by mercy and sacrifice,
by entering into relationships in which you received gifts and gave gifts in due season.

We are blessed with a knowledge of God and of ourselves that the creatures of Mobile Bay likely
do not have.
Our horizons and hope are greater than the natural world and its hierarchies.
Let us hope and strike to take our place in the blest communion which has been opened to us in
Jesus.