

## **“Called to Hope”**

Sirach 44:1-15; Ephesians 1: 15-18  
San Francisco, November 2, 2003

Anybody need more Kleenex? I brought some extra, because I knew this would be a 3-hanky service.

It is moving beyond words when we say their names. It is such a profound experience to speak these souls into our world, by saying their names out loud.

Hearing a list of names is no big deal – nobody cries when the professor calls the class roll, there are no tears when they call the names for jury duty, I turn the radio off when they get to that roster of producers and directors at the end of NPR programming.

But on this day, when we say their names. It's not as if they are right here with us, this is when we are reminded that they are always right here with us.

We can feel their essences, their personalities – the essence of them that was expressed in their faces and gestures, their clothes, the sound of their voices, their laughter, the shape of their bodies, and the feel of their hugs. We can see it, and feel it again.

Swedenborg's most profound legacy is in his experience of that world that we perceive only through the eyes of our hearts enlightened, and its living connection with the world that we see, hear, feel, taste, and touch with our conscious minds.

I don't want to call them the "spiritual world" and the "material world" because that implies that they are two separate places, that you have to undertake some journey to get there, that there is some distance between them.

This is not the day we summon people back here from another world, this is the day we remember that this world is around us all the time, that we are in that world as we walk through our days.

In Our Town, Thornton Wilder says, "Now there are some things we all know, but we don't take 'em out and look at 'em very often. We all know that something is eternal. And it ain't houses and it ain't names, and it ain't earth, and it ain't even the stars....Everybody knows in their bones that something is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings...There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being."

Orthodox churches are covered from ceiling to floor with ethereal, other-worldly images, icons, which are created to manifest the spiritual essence of the person represented, and lead the viewer into heaven through the icon's eyes.

This is what Swedenborg calls correspondences. The visible effect of an invisible cause. Physical evidence of a spiritual reality.

This is what we call his sweater, her favorite painting, the nick-nack that always sat at his desk, the salt and pepper shaker that was in her kitchen all those years, that picture of all of us that Christmas. Icons. Correspondences. The link. The bridge.

Again, Thornton Wilder hits the nail on the head. "We ourselves will be loved for a while, and forgotten. But that love will have been enough. All our impulses of love return to the Love that made them. Even memory is not necessary for love. There is a land of the living, and a land of the dead, and the bridge is love."

I noticed that when we say those names, we don't sing the praises of any famous men. Nobody mentioned Mozart or Ella Fitzgerald, or Swedenborg, or even Jesus.

A lot of those names are people who gave us our names, who spoke our names for the very first time, who taught us our names.

Others are people who, in a spiritual sense, knew our names, our essences, because they were closest to our truest selves.

These are the people who called us into being. They called us in from play to dinner, they called us on the phone, they called us daughter, son, lover, friend, they called us on the carpet, they called us silly names we'd never tell anybody. Call your mother!

They called us to imagination, to courage, to creativity, to loyalty, to humor and to our talents. They called us to faith and to forgiveness.

This is my dad's pocketknife, my icon of him. Through it, he calls me to be resourceful, versatile, prepared, sharp, careful.

So, this day is more than just a litany of names and an hour of memories.

It is about the hope to which we have been called by this communion of saints. I can't tell you what that hope is. The Bible doesn't tell you what that hope is. But you know what it is. Your icons will tell you what it is.

Call that name again – this afternoon, this week sometime, whenever it hits you, say it, say it out loud, a couple of times. And listen. Listen with the eyes and ears of your heart enlightened. Listen to your hope.