

So when I was a five years old, like many children of my age, I had a special friend.

A butterfly friend.

One day, my parents had some relatives over to dinner
and, out of the blue, they offered me a cocoon.

We left it to rest in the garden for the night,
and in the morning

it was gone.

I was disappointed of course

but my mother pointing out to one of the butterflies gathering above the flower beds
told me

See, it's there, the white one

it must be your butterfly.

All Saints' Day
Rev. Fanny Belanger

Isaiah 25:6-9
Revelation 21:1-6a
John 11:32-44

And so it was the beginning of a long friendship

with the white butterfly

the bravest and smartest butterfly ever

that could always find me not only at home, but at school, on the playground, even at my grandmother's
who lived on the other side of the country.

Of course, I would not see it during the winter – it was sleeping,

but it always came back

when I did not expect it.

It was there

And it was there for me.

To tell the truth

I must admit that even now I am all grown up and well educated about
butterflies' time traveling distance and life expectancy

and also that it is actually hard to tell a white butterfly from another white butterfly

I must admit

I smile each time I see one of them

It's still there, you know.

Something, I can't tell what it is

as I could not tell what it was when I was a child

Something that lifts my spirit up

Something that speaks about joy and hope and life.

A sign.

We all have our signs nobody knows about

because nobody can understand them

because actually there is nothing to understand and it all seems so stupid.

But sometimes, you see it or hear it and suddenly

It's there.

Something.

A sign that, in spite of all, maybe the universe has meaning, is friendly and wishes us well.

In John's Gospel, there are seven signs.

What the three other Gospels name “miracles”, John names them “Signs”.

And Lazarus' resurrection we have just heard about

is the last of the seven signs

Jesus gives before he is handed over to death.

According to John, the signs aren't
a spectacle
meant to break the rules, put the world into chaos and life upside down.
The signs – even the most incredible ones like Lazarus' resurrection -
they are nothing in themselves.
They just point to another reality.
And this is all there is to John's Gospel: there is another reality than the one we all know.

Because this is the problem, right?
it is so hard to believe there is another reality than life as we know it
we think there is one world, one reality
as so, according to the laws of logic,
if something is true,
well that probably means the opposite is wrong.
Life and death.

When we find out that death is not an illusion
not something so remote from us
But something that happens, stinks, breaks hearts and divides families
We start thinking all we used to know about life must be a big fat lie.
All we work for, all we long for
it keeps us going all right
but at the end of the day, at the end of the road, what are they more than an illusion
If it all ends in dust and dirt?

Today we have two sisters
Like many sisters they think they are the same
think alike, feel alike
when everybody knows they are so different.

And we know from another story that Mary is the dreamer, the quiet and fragile one
When Martha is the energetic, can-do woman, the assertive one
Yet, they are both united by their love of their brother.
And also: They are both united by their love of Christ.
One is the mystic, the other one the down to earth believer
But no matter what their faith look like
in front of the funeral stone
they learn it the hard way:
It is going to take faith to keep the faith.

Mary is turned to the past: “Lord, if you had been there”
Martha looks at the present: “Lord, don't go there”
Too late, if only, what can be done and what cannot be undone
and this all there is to their grieving universe: the past, the present, one world, one reality.

But Jesus comes
to roll away the stone
that keeps their eyes from seeing.
Jesus sees this world neither as it is nor as it has ceased to be
Jesus sees this world as it is going to be
supposed to be
The theater of God's glory.

Jesus sees from afar, from the future, from the Holy city coming down out of heaven.
Jesus comes to tear down the veil that despair, sin and death are spinning like a web around our reality.
There is another reality
God's reality
Lazarus standing in his strips in front of the tomb is the white butterfly that shows up to tell us that –
maybe the universe has meaning
and maybe it'll do good to us
if we let it be.

Three times it is said in our readings
that God will wipe away all our tears.
But I guess the question for us is the same than it was for the two sisters:
Are we able to receive the consolation?

A consolation that comes through mourning and grieving
not denying pain, avoiding death, but getting through them?
Then indeed we'll have to understand salvation from a very different point of view.
Carl Jung and Nouwen after him came up with this famous notion that we can be a “wounded healer”
Well, Jesus is the weeping comforter.

I learned recently that the “Jesus wept” is the shortest verse in the whole Bible,
yet it has given rise to many commentaries.
How can Jesus weep, if he knows better? If he sees the world from
a whole different point of view?

Well, doesn't our heart sink when our own children are in pain
even if they are just
freaking out at a nightmare or despaired at their first break-up?
Don't we hurt, even if we know better than this?
The thing is
Because we know better
it's even worst
We would give the world to spare them and be in their shoes.

Knowing better is the only way to compassion
Because you see things from the future
You know it'll get better, you know it all will and should be different
And so you're ready to take the pain:
You suffer the same but you have bigger shoulders is all.

In this passage it's pretty clear that Jesus offers up his life to save his friend.
He comes to Jerusalem when everybody is looking for him
and it's going to condemn him.
But isn't it more bearable to suffer yourself than to witness the suffering of your own children?

Yet, Jesus does not save us with a display of magic powers, he saves us with his wounds and his tears
He can bear them and bear ours
because of his true faith and true compassion.

This is salvation.
At least, this is the way Jesus wants it to be.
Because as much as you love your children, you can't and won't spare them from living their own lives.

We learn at the beginning of our chapter that on purpose Jesus delays his coming
to manifest God's glory
that's the last sign
giving his life for Lazarus, he will give his life for all of us.
And in our world today, he still delays his coming
so we all have time to receive compassion and mercy
we are saved not from our suffering, but through our suffering that becomes his suffering
until the last little one enters the holy city.

All Saints

It means: we're all together in this.
What would it look like for us today
to go and look for our brother or our sister beyond the stone of loneliness, poverty and rejection?
What kind of faith, what kind of compassion?

Our feast today invites us to see the signs
To receive the consolation
To look at the world from God's point of view
Look at ourselves, look at others not as they are, were
but are called to be
And ask ourselves, from this perspective
What does really matter?
What could be done differently?
What means our today's reality in the balance of eternity?

A recent survey says that most people over ninety state that if they could have a second chance
they would take more risks in life.
They would take more risks in life
they don't say they would save more for retirement!
Because he knows retirement and even tomb stone are not our ultimate destination
Jesus takes the risks of the true faith and true compassion
to unbind us from our strips
to let us walk to the new city.

We cannot see yet the new city
But sometimes we can see a sign that talks about this place where God is king
it can be a white butterfly
It can also be a black man.

Today, we should feel so honored and grateful that the first Afro-American Presiding Bishop is going to
be installed
Somebody from a people once silenced and oppressed
is going to be our guide and our spiritual leader.
Isn't it God's wonder?
Doesn't it talk to all of us
from the future
from this place where the universe wishes us well
God, people and all creation reconciled?

At our turn -
even if we cannot be a saint yet -
May we all be a sign, may we all bring forth to others a glimpse of this vision of eternity. Amen