

John Hanis

John was a man of strong commitments where it mattered most: to his family, his friends, his country, his work and his church. He lived frugally. He did not draw a lot of attention to himself, but people knew they could rely on him. A man of personal faith, he kept his family together, both the Catholics and the Episcopalians. He found unity where others saw diversity. He lived life his own way, but totally consistent to his internal values, even if not everyone else understood them. His decisions made sense to John, and they made him a compelling figure.

John maintained an unshakable belief in Christ, whose teachings guided his days and steadied his steps. He was not unlike St. Paul, who maintained his strong belief in Christ, built largely on personal experience. After an encounter on the road to Damascus, Paul became a fervent disciple of Jesus' teachings, an author of many important letters, and an unwavering apostle bearing witness to the promise of eternal life.

Near the end of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, he takes up the question of those within the Christian community who have died. Paul comforted a group of believers who mourned the loss of loved ones who had shared their faith. They had all taken to heart Jesus' promise that he would come again, but he had not returned, family members were dying, and those still alive wondered about the future of the living and the dead.

In the passage that served as our second reading today, Paul began his reply with this foundational belief: "Christ has been raised from the dead." There were plenty of witnesses, including people whom Paul had met. And Paul himself had seen a vision of the risen Christ on the day of his conversion. His personal testimony removed doubts.

As wonderful as it was, the resurrection was not the end of the story. Paul continued immediately with this description of Christ, he is "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." What happened to Christ can happen to his followers. Just as we share humanity, so we can share the mystery of divinity. Paul continues, "just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life." Jesus rose from the dead; so can we.

This belief sustains Christians and motivates us to live faithfully so that at the end of our days we may rise with Christ, not only to be with him, but also with our loved ones who rest in his peace. Although Christianity has many branches, we all share this common theme. Christ holds us together, just as Christ held John together.

Even as we mourn the passing of our brother, we take comfort in the way he lived his life, keeping Christ at the center, and making decisions based on that core belief. If we do the same, our words will provide inspiration where there is misunderstanding, light where there is controversy, unity where there is division. May we who shared mortality with John one day share immortality with him—and with Christ, who rules over all and binds us as one.