

**Homily at the Eucharist of the Resurrection  
In Memory Alden Poole  
Saint John the Baptist Catholic Church, Quincy, MA  
October 23, AD 2015**

—HOMILIST: REV. EMMANUEL CHARLES MCCARTHY

“This is the day that the Lord has made: let us therefore rejoice and be glad therein” (Ps 118: 24).

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

To loosely paraphrase Mark Antony’s “homily” at Julius Caesar’s funeral, “I come to this Eucharist today not to praise Alden, but to thank God.” Eucharist in Greek means thanksgiving. This Eucharist, every Eucharist is a Liturgy of thanksgiving rooted in the human memory of the great deeds of love that God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—has done for all human beings. Today we have a particular focus in memory on the great deeds of love the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, have done for and through Alden for his own good and for the good of all humanity. The Psalms exhort us to “Give thanks to the Lord, who is good, whose love endures forever” (Ps 118:1) and so we shall.

Alden was a newspaperman, so perhaps it is fitting, here at the beginning of this homily at this Mass of the Resurrection being offered for him and in remembrance of him, to quote another newspaperman— Art Buchwald.

The very last words of the last column that Art Buchwald wrote, knowing that he was near death, read,

“I think now of a song lyric, “What's it all about, Alfie?” I don't know how well I've done while I was here. I know it's very egocentric to believe that someone is put on Earth for a reason. In my case, I like to think I was.

But, “What's it all about, Alfie?”

What’s it all about?

The unfathomable immensity of time and space, the incomprehensibility of the Source of it all, of God and His Plans, leaves all people as baffled as Buchwald, saying, “What’s it all about?” Each human being is born into a question mark and lives for a brief time within an infinitely large question mark. Further, each must die into that same inscrutable question mark. Why is this the way it is for each and all who walk on earth? What’s it all about?

And, “What’s it all about” not only is a question that is derived from human awareness of the impenetrable mystery of the physical universe, e.g., “Why is there something rather than nothing,” but also arises out of such universal questions as the one the Prophet Jeremiah asked God six hundred years before Jesus; “Why do the wicked prosper and the poor suffer?”

Alden believed, as I believe, the Church's teaching that we are here on earth "to know, to love and to serve God in this world and to be happy with Him in the next." However, that does not explain what it is all about. It just states what we are supposed to be about.

But how do I know how to know, how to love and how to serve God in this world and be happy with God in the next, when I have not the slightest idea of what kind of God God is or what God expects of me, if anything. I can use every ounce of reasoning power I have to search for the answer. I can become a walking encyclopedia of philosophy, knowing all the contradictory answers reason can offer to the questions "What kind of God is God if God exists and what does God expect of me, if anything," and be as cognitively empty-handed at the end as I was at the beginning of my search. So, every human being sooner or later must terminate his or her rational search for "What's it all about?" in the muddy whirlpool of sophisticated or unsophisticated philosophical speculation, and choose in faith the ground upon which he or she will stand and live his or her unique earthly life. This primal choice from faith, and not from reason, is a universal requirement of human existence, regardless of whether a person chooses to believe God is love or God does not exist, whether a person chooses to believe reason is all I have to live by or that God loves some people and hates others. Every person must live by a faith he or she chooses—and no faith has any more support in the domain of reason alone than any other.

Alden chose to stand with Jesus and His understanding of what kind of God God is and what God expects of people. Specifically, he chose to build his life on the foundation of Jesus and His revelation that "God is love (agapé)," God is "Abba," God is "Father of all." And from this faith commitment logically flowed exactly what Julian of Norwich, seven hundred years ago, said flows: "God loved us before He made us and His love has never diminished and never shall. In the end all will be well, all shall be well, all manner of things shall be well."

But choosing to ground one's life in the faith that "God is love" does not mean one does not have to live his or her life like every other human being in this "vale of tears," this cauldron of troubles and sorrows—that is the human situation. I think it appropriate here to hear a bit about Alden's life as he wrote about it in 1995.

"I had heard or read almost nothing about conscientious objection, pacifism, or the application of Christian principles to the issues of military service. I enlisted in the Army two weeks after high school graduation, chosen for an officer-training program, which promised to send me through an accelerated college program, give me a degree and a second lieutenant's commission, and then send me to war. The promise was promptly broken after one semester at Norwich University, when we were all dumped into the infantry as buck privates and sent to France in the fall of 1944.

I went into combat on my 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, and soon after, I went up to my first dead German soldier. There was an ugly dark hole in his forehead. On his belt buckle was engraved—as with all Wehrmacht soldiers—the words *Got Mit Uns*, "God With Us." It was a shock to learn that German soldiers were Christian believers. In his pockets were a Rosary, a Catholic pocket missal and pictures of his wife and children. The realization swept over me, as it must have with soldiers throughout history, that war was insane. That I had nothing against this man, and he,

nothing against me. That we were pawns in a game not of our making, a game played by statesmen. The seeds of a later rejection of war and violence were planted that day.

As the days and weeks went by, my revulsion and yes, terror, grew within. Preparing myself emotionally and spiritually, over and over again, to die, to be maimed, or blown to bits, while trying to carry on my duties as a soldier, was wearing me down. Finally, one day while we were under a heavy barrage of German 88's and mortars, I lost it, stood up yelling and screaming incoherently. My buddies somehow got me to the aid station. The medics injected me with morphine, and shipped me to a field hospital. I was filled with guilt and shame for having cracked up in battle, for having let my buddies down by not finishing the war with them.

I would later learn from Historian Michael Adams' book, The Best War Ever, that for men exposed to combat continuously for 28 days the mental breakdown rate was 80%. I learned in the Okinawa 26,211 US soldiers were mental casualties. But, I came out of the war with my combat infantry badge and six decorations, including the Bronze Star, and a belief that while war was hell, it is usually justified when Uncle Sam is fighting it.

The years right after the war were difficult for me. I was outraged that US civilians were so ignorant of war's reality, so brainwashed by media and movie glorification and mythmaking. I tried college but couldn't hack it, was in therapy with the Veterans Administration that got nowhere with the combat-related trauma that was crippling me. I had lost God somewhere along the way. And then, broke, discouraged and unemployed in a Florida garage pad with a drinking buddy, I received a package in the mail from a waitress I had met while bartending on Cape Cod the previous summer.

It was Thomas Merton's best-seller, The Seven Storey Mountain, and it electrified me. God was real. A miracle of faith had happened inside me, authentic and profound. I joyfully took instructions and was received into the Catholic faith.

I married the waitress who sent me the book. Janet and I have nine children and fifteen grandchildren.

My conversion brought healing and career success as a news executive on the old Boston Herald and later as communications professor at Simmons College. But I was still trapped in the mainstream mindset about war and nonviolence. It wasn't until years later, years of reading Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Dan Berrigan, Tolstoy, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and other advocates of nonviolence, that my perspective really changed. Two events of the early Eighties changed my life, and that of my wife, Janet. One was learning through the death of a heroic young pacifist, John Leary, that a house modeled on the Catholic Worker existed in Boston. The other was meeting the founders of the Agapé ministry, Suzanne Belote and Brayton Shanley. I immediately arranged for an early retirement from the college where I was teaching and have been involved with both Haley House Catholic Worker in Boston and the Agapé ministry ever since."

"The day a person sees a truth is the day that God wants him or her to begin to live it," writes Saint Edith Stein. This Alden courageously did with grace across the decades of his life. Thanks be to God.

But what about that dead enemy soldier from seventy years ago, with the ugly dark hole in his forehead and in his pocket a Rosary, a Catholic pocket missal and pictures of his wife and children, who was killed in the process of trying to kill others. Where is he now? He is with Alden, and they are reconciled and at peace with each other through the knowledge and the love of the One into whom they were both Baptized for all time and eternity. That soldier was essentially not a German any more than Alden was essentially an American. Essentially, they are both eternal members of the Body of Christ into which they were Baptized and nothing, “neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor present things nor future things, nor powers, nor heights, nor depths, nor any other creature can have separated us [them] from the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rm 8:38-39). They and all human beings belong to God, who is love, now and always and forever. And, in the climactic great deed of Divine love for human beings God, who is love, became human in Jesus of Nazareth “not to condemn but to seek and to save what was lost” (Lk 19:10; Mt 18:11-14; Jn 3:17).

“We set our hope on the living God who is the Savior of all” (1 Tm 4:10). “God our Savior wills everyone to be saved” (1 Tm 2:4) and “gave His life as a ransom for all” (1 Tm 2:6).

Does this mean that human beings can throw the truth of God’s will to the wind and be a libertine, a killer, a hater, an oppressor etc., because God’s love for us will save us and therefore we need not worry any longer about doing evil? Of course not! Evil brings suffering and misery down on both its perpetrator and its recipient. God made flesh in Jesus is like us in all things but sin. When any human being, including God Incarnate, sees someone he or she loves suffer, he or she suffers. God Incarnate, who loves all infinitely, suffers when we make others, whom He loves, suffer by doing evil to them or when we, whom He loves, bring suffering down on ourselves by doing evil. A person can choose to be a libertine, a killer, a hater, an oppressor, etc., but that in no way diminishes God’s love for him or her. God’s love of each person is everlasting and unconditional. Sin, however, with the misery it throws down on others, as well as self prolongs human suffering as well as the suffering of Jesus. Pascal, I believe, enunciated it this way: “Christ remains nailed to the cross until the last tear is wiped away.” Or, perhaps better, the words of the Prophet Isaiah, “In all their afflictions He was afflicted” (Is 63:9). To do evil is to cause suffering to human beings, including Jesus, suffering that must be repaired. But it does not cause God to love a person less than infinitely and eternally.

It is sometimes difficult to stand firm in the faith of the Nonviolent Jesus of the Gospels and in faith in the Nonviolent Jesus of the Gospels and His Way of Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies—no exceptions. The fog that fear, concupiscence, suffering, sin, systemic evil and death can bring into the mind and soul can cloud our spiritual vision of “God is love” and challenge our desire and commitment to live from that faith stance. Sometimes it borders on the impossible to say, “Alleluia.” Nevertheless, “God is Love” and “God is with us,” so let us “give thanks to the Lord for His merciful love endures forever.”

“This is the day the Lord has made—‘the Lord who loved us before He made us and whose love has never diminished and never shall’—let us therefore rejoice and be glad therein!” Amen.