

We are in God's hands.

At least that is an image many people carry with us as we think of our relationship with God. We all know the line from the spiritual, "He's got the whole world in his hands." And I remember a preacher once saying that God is like the old Allstate commercial that said, "You are in good hands" (the preacher said that the difference is that God doesn't drop you out when things get bad!). There is also an image from Jonathan Edwards, a famous preacher in the early years of America, who said we are "Sinners in the hands of an angry God."

So if we believe and imagine that we are in God's hands, what does that mean exactly? How does that metaphor really work in how we think of and live into our relationship with God? How do hands work in human relationships? How does God use his "hands" with each one of us and through all of us together? What do you think?

I'd like us to consider three ways that human hands are used in our lives to help us imagine how God's hands touch us, so to speak, in order to help us to remember—or to think differently about—how God relates to us.

Let's begin by thinking of a mother's hands. Imagine a mom right after the birth of her child, reaching to hold that newborn baby close to her. As that child grows up, her mother will stroke her hair, change her diapers, prepare her meals, and give mom hugs, all as ways to love her child. In all of human life, there are no hands that love quite like a mother's. And God loves us as a mother loves her children.

When we imagine ourselves in the hands of God, we must trust that reality in even deeper ways. God's hands for us are tender and strong and always working for our best, like the hands that express the caring heart of a good mother.

Let's think of other hands—the hands of an artist. Have you ever seen one of those YouTube videos of an artist creating? It can be a painter, a potter, or a sculptor. As the artist creates, it is amazing to watch her hands work on whatever the media is—paint, clay, or stone. The hands of the artist are really like another work of art happening concurrent with the work being created.

An artist's hands are of course an extension of the mind of the artist, which contains her vision for what the artist sees and seeks from her work. The artist's hands have skill and finesse and power to get done what needs to be done for the result the artist wants.

God's hands are like those of an artist. God has a plan for reality and God works with the stuff of our world—including you and me—to create beautiful and wondrous art. St. Paul even went so far as to say, “We are God’s work of art, created in Christ Jesus for the good works which God has already designated to make up our way of life” (Eph 2:10, *NAB*).

So when we imagine ourselves in the hands of God, we must remember and trust God as artist. In those YouTube videos, the work of the artist as it is being recorded often yields an unexpected result. That is part of the joy of those recordings. Likewise, God’s hands are doing work among us that we often do not fully see or understand. Sometimes it will result in a delightful reveal and we can cry “Aha!” And sometimes the art work is not finished during our lifetimes.

The hands that most fully reveal how we are in the hands of God are the hands of Jesus. Throughout his early life, he did the work of an artist as he worked with wood. And later in his public ministry, his hands were often like the hands of a mother, loving and caring for the people in the crowds as well as his disciples. Jesus would heal with his hands, wash feet with his hands, embrace with his hands, and bless and forgive with his hands.

The hands of Jesus also reveal a deeper truth about the hands of God-- they are bloody hands, scarred hands. Those hands of Jesus that were nailed to the cross are the hands that tell us ultimately how we are in God’s hands. Because in addition to the power of God’s hands in creating this world in all its complexity and mystery, God also became human and subjected himself to the worst of our world in order to reveal God and humanity’s best— courage, compassion, and forgiveness that Jesus’ scarred and bloody hands brought to all of us.

Today some of us might have a hard time imagining God’s hands. We may feel like the hands of God have dropped us out or even struck us down. On our worst days, we may think that Jonathan Edwards had it right—that we are “sinners in the hands of an angry God.” It is then that we need other hands to reveal the hands of God—the hands of one another.

St. Teresa of Avila said that Christ has no hands on earth but ours. Her vision of Christ’s Body on earth makes clear that God works through each one of us and all of us together to reveal those divine hands that love and comfort and heal us. No matter how we imagine and trust in God’s hands, our sacred imagination becomes a reality through the work of human hands, whether that work is hum drum or heroic.

Today we celebrate All Saints Day. It is a day when the image of God’s hands might especially help us. First on this day we remember those whom we have committed into God’s hands—our loved ones who have died. There is comfort in knowing that the God who loves like a mother and creates like an artist is now caring for the people we love who are no longer

physically with us here on earth. Though we miss those loved ones who have died, we also know they are entrusted into God's good hands.

But All Saints Day is not only about remembering our shared communion with those who have died, those we have committed into the hands of God. It is also about remembering those people whom God has entrusted to us here on earth, the people who surround us in our everyday lives. Family members, neighbors, fellow parishioners, people near to us in many ways; and people who are very different from us—strangers, people on the margins of our lives and our society, even enemies. God's hands hold all of us—and God guides our hands to help us hold others as God holds us all.

So today, on this All Saints Day, we rejoice that we are in God's hands; and especially as we think of those we love who have died and who are now being embraced by God as a mother holds her child. And we also know that as God holds us and cares for us, God is working in and through us all to create God's artwork of care and compassion in the world. Amen.