

Luke 6:20-31, Ephesians 1:11-23

Although All Saints Day actually falls on November 1, today, the Sunday following, is the day we celebrate it. Who is a saint? If you are baptized and wearing white, please stand (remain standing). Those who are baptized and wearing black, please stand. Again, those wearing red and baptized stand. Those who are wearing brown and are baptized, please stand. If you are baptized and wearing grey, please stand. Green and baptized stand... those who are baptized and wearing pink or beige, blue or purple, or any other color, please stand. Take a look around... You are all members of the communion of saints. (you can sit now)

Why do we celebrate All Saints Day? Because we want to remember that those of use who have been baptized and those who have passed away in the last twelve months, as well as those who have gone on before this, are all one body of the communion of saints. Baptism is what brings us into the body, and we are surrounded by the communion of saints.

As saints we are blessed. We are not "more blessed" than the poor, hungry, sorrowful, scorned or rejected, because some blessings are not physical manifestations of God's goodness. What are blessings? Being a part of the kingdom of God, having the ability to take communion, having forgiveness, laughter, being surrounded by the communion of saints, knowing that because of God's grace through Jesus Christ we can go to heaven; these are the blessings that are available to each person.

Malcolm Guite, a leading Christian poet of our time, has written a poem "A Last Beatitude"

And blessed are the ones we overlook;
the faithful servers on the coffee rota,
He ones who hold no candle, bell or book
But keep the books and tally up the quotes,
The gentle souls who come to 'do the flowers',
The quiet ones who organize the fete,
Church sitters who give up their weekday hours,
Doorkeepers who may open heaven's gate.
God knows the depths that often go unspoken
Amongst the shy, the quiet, and the kind,
Or the slow healing of a heart long broken,
Placing each flower so for a year's mind.
Invisible on earth, without a voice,
In heaven their angels glory and rejoice.

Guite reminds us of those persons who do the tasks that are often overlooked and not acknowledged; he reminds us that they too are blessed.

As always on All Saints Day the Beatitudes were read for our gospel lesson because they allow us to know the significance of our actions, especially those that require sacrifice in order to do the right things. Our actions matter. These are a part of our life here on earth. The rest of our life is on another plain. Blessedness or happiness is for those who do what is right even though they don't see the consequences, because there is a continuum between earth and heaven. The importance of what is done on earth cannot be confined to the here and now; it will be remembered in the then and there. As it is written in 1 Corinthians 13: "for now I see as in a mirror dimly, but then I will see clearly." Someday the full significance of all our deeds will be known and celebrated.

There are those who believe that the idea of a heavenly realm ruled by our creator is a utopian fantasy, an opioid for the masses. We know this is untrue. There has been nothing in history that has prompted people to make the world a better place than the knowledge that what I do in the here and

now is significant. Not only in the here and now but in the then and there. What we as Christians believe about heaven does not deny the importance of our life here on this earth, it actually improves it. It teaches us to live a life worthy of sainthood, where others' needs are deemed as important as our own, where jealousy, envy, and greed are set aside. As in the reading from Ephesians this morning through Christ we have received a glorious inheritance. We set our hope on Christ and in him we find our salvation. We live as a glorious part of the communion of saints.

This all comes from our faith in God. Our faith needs our attention if it is going to grow. Paul, who wrote the letter to the Ephesian church, knew the value of developing the habit of faith. He practiced his faith like an athlete training for a sporting event. He exercised it like he exercised his body. If he didn't do that, Paul said, there was a good chance his faith would fail him. Practice is necessary in any area of life in which we want to excel.

And so we practice our faith. We don't hide it under a bushel where the world cannot see it. We live our life out of our belief in Jesus Christ who through God the Father has given us the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Spirit, who gives us desire to be a part of the communion of saints.

There's a cute story about a little boy whose aunt visited every year, and every year she asked him the same question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" He never really had an answer until one year, knowing that she was visiting that day, thought he had found the answer to silence her forever. When she asked the perfunctory question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" he answered, "A saint." She, and his father who was standing there, were flabbergasted.

That night after he fell asleep, he was awakened by a light on his face. As he awoke, he realized there was an angel standing next to him. The angel said, "You called me." The little boy gulped "I didn't!" The angel nodded. "You said you wanted to be a saint. Here I am, to help you." "But I didn't mean it," protested the little boy. "Too late," said the angel. "You spoke the words. They can't be unspoken."

He sat himself comfortably on the bed. "Where shall we start? Shall I tell you about saints in the past?" And the angel went on to talk about saints such as St. Augustine, St. Julian of Norwich, St. George, the patron saint of England who was a knight in shining armor and killed a terrible fire-breathing dragon to save the people. And Joan of Arc among others. The little boy said, "I'm only ordinary, so I'll never be a saint."

Then the angel beamed. "That's really what I've come to tell you. When the Christian Church first started, all Christians were known as 'saints'. That was the name for them. If you just grow up being yourself and hanging onto to Jesus with all your might, you'll be a saint too. That's the secret of all the saints, the ones you know and all those many saints you've never heard of. Why, if you look around your church congregation, you'll probably find a number of saints."

"You mean," asked the little boy, "I can just be myself, not especially good or anything, and as long as I keep holding onto God for all I'm worth, I won't necessarily die some horrible death, and I could become a saint?" The angel nodded. "Oh well," said the little boy. "That's all right then." And he turned over and went back to sleep.

Of course we must do more than just sleep. We must believe that Jesus is the Son of God who takes away the sin of the world because God loves us so much, and we love God because of what God has done for us. It is out of this love that we respond with love to grow the kingdom of God. All glory be to God.