

All Saint's
St. Luke 6:20-31
November 6, 2016
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

From Forward Day By Day For SUNDAY, November 6: All Saints Sunday:

Ephesians 1:15 *I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints.*

"If I hadn't known him personally, I would think the stories were urban legends. In one account, Herbert Thompson, former bishop of the Diocese of Southern Ohio, left the Archbishop of Canterbury waiting on an airport runway while he talked with an airline baggage carrier. In another, Bishop Thompson ignored the long reception line to crouch on his knees after worship, praying at eye level with a young boy.

Among the bishop's closest friends was a custodian, a man who didn't graduate from high school but could charm the most stubborn of machines and coax the finest finish from a plank of wood. Another confidant: Nobel Prize winner Desmond Tutu.

Bishop Thompson modeled a joyful faith and a graceful embrace of all people, regardless of their station in life, educational background, financial acumen, race, age, or gender. He took time to be truly present with each person he encountered, which wreaked havoc on schedules but shone Christ's love from the heavens, a reminder that practice for saintly living begins here on earth."

"Don't Call Me A Saint!"

"Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil..."

Some people find these words an epitaph for their life experience: marginalized, alienated, pushed aside, forgotten,

lost, ignored, despised, unwanted, alone. And all through no fault of their own. We know these people: they are the ones who seem very different from us, at least in appearance. These are God's lost sheep, who wander through life, hoping someone will find them and care; that someone will reach out and touch their wounds. Such is the ministry of a saint, finders of God's lost loves, and these are the ministries we remember and celebrate today.

God has a special place in God's heart for the down-trodden, the outcast, the poor, the sick, the forgotten. The Gospels constantly show that Jesus came to reach out and save the lost and the lowly. Jesus was criticized for spending time with and hanging out with the people whom most others rejected. We know their groups from the gospels. Their names are familiar in our ears: the lepers; the mentally ill; the sick; the demon possessed; tax collectors; promiscuous sinners; women of ill repute; the uneducated; Samaritans. And he calls us to the same ministry in our lives: to reach out to those who are lost, forgotten, marginalized. They are still with us today, and their situation in life is not unlike that of their first century counterparts. And God's call remains to each of us to reach out to them.

Perhaps that is not so exciting and heroic as other things which bring fame and fortune on this world. The outcasts, the marginalized are not noticed much, so why should those who reach out to them be?

Some saints are well known and far more are unknown, known only to God. Yet their lives made a difference on this earth. They reflected the light of God on the darkness in the world and made it a brighter place to live. They showed others the love of God and the way home to God.

'Don't call me a saint! You would be sadly mistaken,' is the response a real saint would give you if you tried to apply that appellation upon them. "I am no saint, just a soldier for Christ!

Anne Lamott described what makes a saint a saint about a well-known contemporary of ours, in her book, *Help. Thanks, Wow*, [p.62] in this way:

"Is it okay yet to love and admire Mother Teresa again? Can we forget her detractors for long enough to remember that most mornings she was out there on the streets of Calcutta cleaning some person's butt the day before he died, without telling anybody about it?"

I knew a Saint. I was remembering and pondering my experience of his life and its impact on me, just this past week, as I stood alone in this church at the end of the day Tuesday evening. He won't have a statue dedicated to him, nor will he have a day on the church calendar, yet I believe he is counted among the special and holy saints of God. On this earth he never called attention to himself, but called attention to Jesus. He dedicated his life to Jesus.

I first met him in the social action circles of the church. We shared concern for social justice and for the poor, and he was always up to witness for justice and peace. He would lie down and get arrested at many rallies for peace to make the point, and he did so as a priest of God. Every time a submarine was launched in Groton, he was there to witness for peace and against the horrors of nuclear war. He went to Washington D.C. to witness against Apartheid. He participated in many protests of the religious who went to various places in South America to minister to the poor and were murdered: Catholic sisters and a Bishop himself, Oscar Romero. He ministered to

school children who felt lost or excluded and helped them find their place on this earth when he served as the chaplain at Xavier High School in Middletown where he was much loved by all.

But the main thing about him was that he was an advocate and minister to the lost sheep. His whole ministry, just about, was focused on those who were lost and bringing them back to Christ, just like the Good Shepherd did that he loved and followed.

This included his extensive ministry to gay people who were rejected and cast out of the Roman Catholic Church in the 1980's. For doing so, he was cast out of the church himself. And because of his ministry and calling, he not only reached out to the outcast gay people, but also he reached out to all those cast out and who were disaffected from the church, including the divorced and others who disagreed with the social pronouncements of the Roman Catholic Church. He was about finding and ministering to the lost sheep of God, that not one he could find would remain lost and apart.

He struggled with depression over the loss of his priesthood. He drank for a time and gave it up, even then ministering to alcoholics and bringing them back to the church and to God. And despite his own inner struggles, he continued to minister to the lost and those on the margins. He worked in the mental health field, reaching out and helping the most unloved and unlovable of that lot. He was always about reaching out to the lost, teaching them with God's love, and helping in whatever way he could.

He even ministered to me, after I left my job in the church and helped me find a new job and was among the few who reached

out to me and gave me support and encouragement when I was wandering scared and alone. His ministry helped me find my way back to the church when I was feeling hurt and in pain. I am here today because the man ministered to me. He did this while he busied himself with his own ministry of caring and reaching out to so many others. In return, I helped him and encouraged him to be received in our Church as an Episcopal Priest. After ten long years and his ministry in our Anglican Franciscan Monastic Order, he became an Episcopal Priest in California, where he continued his ministry both there and abroad in South America and Asia.

So much I remember about him underscored how much the Gospel had transformed this man into a likeness of Christ, reflecting the love of God on earth. If he was given a gift, he quickly passed it on to someone who was poor who needed one. He wore his work clothes until they were thread bare and ready to fall off of him. The same for his shoes and his car. He drove a 15 year old Toyota. He became an outcast to minister to the outcast. He became poor to minister to the poor, and as Francis modeled the Gospel of Jesus, so also did he.

He died several years ago now of cancer. His funeral filled Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Middletown, Connecticut, which seats several thousand people. It was the largest service there in recent memory.

What would he want me to say about him to describe him? He tried to follow the Gospel of Jesus Christ and live it the best he could. He loved being a priest. He loved ministry to others. He was generous. He inspired generosity in others. He lived a simple life. He was human. He had his weaknesses and faults. But most of all, he reached out to those who were lost, marginalized, rejected, wandering alone. And he loved them

with God's love. *"Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil..."* He was their blessing from God.

All Baptized Christians are called to be Saints. That is our vocation in life. We are to live according to the 25th chapter of Matthew's Gospel. *"As you did it to the least of these, you did it to me."* What Saints have touched your life? I am sure you have known a few. Say a prayer for them, and take a lesson from them. Like the old hymn says, *"You are called to be one too!"* Amen