

## All Saints Day 2018

Today we are celebrating All Saints Day, that is actually the feast day for November 1<sup>st</sup> ... however, because we feel it is such an important day of celebration we moved it to today ... when most of the parishioners gather. All Saints day is a time when we honor all those who have passed on to the Kingdom of Heaven, to celebrate their life after death, to celebrate all the saints who have gone before us to be with our Lord. And who are these saints? They are the friends, relatives, spouses, moms and dads, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters who have died ... and they are you ... each and every one of us are the saints of this world ... children of God. I find it interesting that the actual Gospel for today says this from Mark: One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

I personally believe this is the guideline to sainthood ... not that I obey this commandment on a daily basis but it is my focus on living ... and, I think, hopefully, it is all of ours. That is what God asks of us .... to keep this "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength ... Love your neighbor as yourself..." as our goal in our daily living.

I mention this first because I have a funny feeling that some of you may not feel very saintly because you don't DO enough ... you put golf before God at times, read novels instead of the Bible, go to the movies instead of helping out at church ... staying home on a cold snowy day instead of going to church.

I am here to tell you, AGAIN, that saints are those who give up the anti-faith alternative of trying to please God by their good deeds and, instead, trust God alone. We all have to believe God to be God, who loves us unconditionally, who will be there for us when we are in need of strength and wisdom, and will be there when we need to confess our wrong doing and to forgive us.

In today's Gospel Jesus says *"Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"*

We are asked to believe ... not do something ...

Madeleine L'Engle wrote a great story to illustrate this point. A good man dies and goes to heaven and who is welcomed at the pearly gates, which are thrown open for him to enter. He goes through them in a daze of bliss, because it is everything he has been taught, golden streets, milk and alabaster and honey and golden harps. He wanders the streets in

happiness until after a while he realizes that he is all alone; he hasn't seen anybody at all. He walks and walks, and he sees nobody. So he goes back to the gates, and he asks.

Peter? Yes, my son?

This is really heaven?

Oh, yes, my son. Don't you like it?

Oh, it's just wonderful! But where is everybody? Where are the prophets? Where is the Holy Family? Where are the saints?

Peter looks at him kindly. "Oh, them? They're all down in hell, ministering to the damned. If you'd like to join them I will show you the way."

These people didn't have to show their love for God by doing ... they were already there with God ... but they chose to continue God's work. That is the heart of God ... you DO because you want to ... you do not HAVE to. You are all that God wants you to be right now ...

There is another category of saints that might be confusing you ... it is that of those special people from ages past who are placed on the calendar of saints and are held up for the world to emulate, people like Lazarus and Mary in today's Gospel, Francis of Assisi or Lady Julian of Norwich, people who have done extraordinary tasks. But we must never forget that each and everyone one of us is called to be extraordinary, even if history does not remember us. We can be extraordinary mothers, astonishing farmers, amazing nurses, outstanding grocery clerks, exceptional bankers, stupendous bakers, dazzling car dealers, or marvelous CPA's ... and, just plain amazing people aside from our jobs. Those on the calendar are not an exclusive group. They are simply the ones history remembers ... but we all have our own history and will hand down the stories of the saints in our lives.

Robert Louis Stevenson described the saints as "the sinners who keep on going."

Our **keeping on** in life often involves suffering. The suffering may involve being poor, mourning, hungering and thirsty and being persecuted. I reflect on the suffering of today ... eleven people in a Pittsburgh synagogue are dead, dozens dead in Eastern Syria, millions starving in Yemen, widespread killings, kidnappings, and communal violence in central Nigeria. 420 shootings took place in Chicago last month, while walking on the sidewalk a little boy was hit by a car while trick or treating Wednesday in Libertyville, and as I look out into the our parish family ... what suffering have you or are you going through?

Today we are talking about a specific suffering that probably each and every one of us has gone through, the suffering of losing a loved one ... the daily suffering of picking up the phone to call that person but they aren't there ... scrambling only 2 eggs instead of 4... rolling over in bed to touch your loved one but it is cold and empty ... that suffering is turned into celebration today ... celebrating not only the precious time we had with them but the precious time they are having now with our Lord. Celebrating their life as saints here on earth ... the good works they have done to help this world be a better place ... the wonderful words of wisdom they left with us to help us in our saintly journey here on earth ... celebrate them in the joy they gave not only to us, but to those around us ...

Yes, I like Robert Louis Stevenson's definition of a saint ... "...the sinners who keep on going."

Years ago I had a very dear friend here at Annunciation. Dear sweet Jean was my best friend, my mentor, my mother, my sister, my confidant ... when she and her husband were

visiting Florida in the winter she woke up one morning and on the way to the bathroom she had an aneurysm and died. Her husband had her cremated and brought her back. We had a memorial service but I never could get over her death ... almost daily I would think of her and almost weekly I would cry for her ... I did this for months. That summer we were on our annual Lutter family vacation in Hayward, Wisconsin. At the end of the week I would always take a walk from our cabin into town ... about 9 miles. My husband, Glenn, would drive into town and meet me. We would have lunch and he would drive me back to our cabin. I always looked forward to this walk because the roads were desolate. I was the only walker on the road. I could talk out loud to God and sing and even skip and dance down the road if I wanted to. However, this year this walk was different ... I was tired of feeling sadness for my friend Jean ... my heart was heavy and I asked God to help me. No, asked is not quite accurate ... I screamed to God to lift this heaviness from my heart. I cried and begged ... then I stopped and God gave me a vision ... I can still see it ... Jesus in his white robe was dancing with Jean in her white robe ... they were holding hands and going around and around, their robes blowing and their faces beaming ... she was so happy, so much joy. I laughed and laughed and my heart was light. That suffering was gone and my Ste. Jean reminded me of her love for me and all that she had taught me about God's love and great joy ... all in a matter of Godly seconds. I practically skipped the rest of the way into town. And to this day when a loved one dies they become part of the dance circle Jesus and Jean started. I picture them in that circle ... I can see their face filled with such joy. That is how we should celebrate today ... celebrate our loved ones who have touched our hearts so much that we are better people because of them. They gave us great joy and why should we lose that joy when they are not physically here with us ... they are the same people who initiated that joyful feeling.

Let me interject here ... I am not talking about happiness, being happy is fleeting, you can be happy one day and sad the next. God's joy is always in us ... in 1 Peter it says it so well ...

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious **joy**,

An old Christian saying is, "A sad saint is a sorry saint." We might add that a sad saint is a contradiction in terms. Being a Christian means being joyous. These words from the third-century martyr Saint Syprian described this well:

*It is a bad world, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and holy people who have learned a great secret. They have found a joy which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of our sinful life.*

Today I am experiencing watching my mother die ... every time I visit there is a little less Emma. The only time she shows real joy is when we talk about her being with our Lord. I know when she is gone I will experience the suffering of loss. However she will always be remembered in our family history ... a saint of God. That is the celebration we are experiencing today ... We the saints of God ... living our life as best we can to the Glory of God ... we are here today to celebrate all the saints who have died but live on in our hearts and give us great joy. Amen