

All Saints' Sunday November 2, 2008

It's All Saints' Sunday—today we remember all of God's Saints—those who have gone before us, those with us now, and those yet to come. We give thanks for their witness and we celebrate their gifts to the life of our Church and of our faith. It's a great day; and it's a day we usually sidestep.

Now, there are several ways we can sidestep this day, and all of them include really good stuff, they include a focus on things that are most certainly true, but...First of all, on All Saints' Day, we usually remind ourselves that, as the Bible makes very clear, we are all saints. Christians are saints by virtue of our Baptism; we are saints by the grace of God, and we are saints by and through being grafted to the holiness of Christ's Church. We are set apart to continue the life and ministry of Christ. That's really what makes us Saints.

So, it is our custom on All Saints' Sunday to remind ourselves that to be a Saint is to be one of us, an ordinary Christian living an ordinary life. It by no means demands extraordinary holiness, uncommon sacrifice, or unusual ability. Being a Saint is really much more a gift than a task, and we need to be careful not to confuse our vocation to faithful Christian living with the heroism of a chosen few, lest we despair; lest we come to see the whole business of the Christian life as something that is reserved for just a handful of folks who make it into the history books. Our call, as ordinary saints, is to walk faithfully the road that is set before us. (In a way, of course, that is exactly what the great ones, past and present have done—although most certainly with the challenge of a vastly different road than ours.) And that is most certainly true enough, not a false word in it, I'll doubtless preach that sermon someday, but....

Another way we sidestep All Saints' Sunday is when we remember that this day is also about, not just the lives and histories of particular, individual Saints, but, and really most importantly, it is also about the Communion of Saints, that mystical fellowship of all who have gone before us—the great and the not so great.

This communion is real. It stretches through time and space, it is a spiritual font of amazing power; and it can sweep us up and move us forward in ways beyond imagining.

This Communion is “the great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes, peoples and languages.” It is the faithful of every generation, joined together by the power of the Holy Spirit into one fellowship in Christ. This communion surrounds us with its presence, enriches us with its fellowship, inspires us with its examples, strengthens us with its prayers, and comforts us with the blessed hope of everlasting life. This is part of who we are.

We, as the Church, as the Communion of Saints, are an article of our own Creed, a part of our own faith. We are part of an unbroken chain of witness and of faith that both surrounds the world and spans the centuries with power and hope. It fills all of creation with the love of God, and it points to that final victory of which, in Christ, we are assured.

We are a part this, an eternal and triumphant part of this, and so we live the life of Christ, not alone, and not only with one another, but also as a part of this glorious fellowship. This we remember on All Saints' Day, and well we should: Every word of it is true, there's not a false note in any of it. I'll doubtless preach that sermon at considerable length someday, But...

And here is the “but...”, here is what we so often sidestep on All Saints' Sunday, and other times as well. We forget, or we cover over with these other potent truths of the faith, the undeniable reality that All Saints' Sunday also calls us to be great for God, and to do great things for God. Sure, that's not all it means to be a Saint, but why can't it mean that for you, and for me, and for us.?

Why not look at those famous people we praise in Sirach on all Souls' Day—those who through intelligence, courage, leadership, wisdom, skill, and determination built up their communities and glorified God—why not look at those and say not only, “how nice”, but also, “Why not? why not me? Why not us?” For we, too, can do great things for God, if we choose, and if we dare.

Why not read of the unnamed multitude from Revelation who came out of their great ordeal, and say to ourselves and to one another that we, too, are called to greatness—to lives that will bring us with joy to the throne of God, and to the fulness of our nature? Why not seek, not just fellowship with those who have gone before, but the opportunity to imitate them, to continue to build what they have built, to continue to reach for their great goal, to continue to make the generations proud?

Why sidestep the full force and call of All Saints' Sunday? Why not seek that for ourselves? Why not seek to be someone great, and to do something great for God? It is our heritage, indeed our legacy. It is in the air we breath and the faith we proclaim. Why not claim it for ourselves, and discover within our own lives the holy determination for such a fate?

We can choose that, if we but learn the way.

And the way is right in front of us. To be great for God, to do great things for God, begins with hearing Jesus tell us what God cherishes, what God sees as best. It is not greatness as the world sees it. Blessed are the poor in Spirit—those who are not full of themselves, and so can be open to God. Blessed are those who mourn—those who actually see and feel the pain of their world and of their lives and of their brothers and sisters, and do not flee from it. Blessed are the meek—those whose trust and values are not in themselves or their own powers, but in God, and in his.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst—not for the sake of their own bellies or their own victories or even their own ideas, but for the righteousness of God. Blessed are the pure in heart—those who will allow neither their own cynicism nor the sin of the world to blur their vision of God's will.

Blessed are the Peacemakers, those who are willing to give up **mine** for the sake of **ours**. And, finally, blessed are those who are willing to pay the price for being, and for doing, something truly great for God.

All of those Saints we talk about and remember, a multitude that no one could count, from every nation, the communion that surrounds us, all who know God and seek greatness in and for him, all of them begin here—with the vision Jesus offers us at the Sermon on the Mount.

So can we. All Saint's Day is not about sidestepping. It is about being great for God. And what we hear today can show us the way.