

For all the saints

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in Saint John's Episcopal Church, Franklin, Massachusetts, on All Saints' Sunday, November 1, 2009.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Matthew 5:6

This Feast of All Saints' commemorates all the saints of God who have gone before us. Saint comes from the Latin, *Sanctus*, referring to that which is holy, sacred, and set apart. When St. Paul sends greetings in his letters to the churches he organized, he addresses all of them as "the saints." Today, we remember all those who have gone before us, both good and not so good, who were still part of our lives. They led varied lives, some were held in great esteem while others led rather ordinary lives. Some of them were more faithful in their commitment to Christ than others. There may be some who are recalled with sadness, even bitterness, while others are remembered with fondness and love.

The great heroes of God are remembered in books; stone and wood carvings, stained glass, while others have no memorials or monuments. We can aspire to live after their examples for their good effect on our lives. God touched all of them in some way. The ones who are remembered in history were transformed by their encounters with God and led extraordinary lives of service to God. They took whatever task God gave them and they did it willingly, if not perfectly. It is for all of the saints of God that we pray today, not because we can do anything for them, but because we still hold them in our love. We can take comfort in knowing that their souls are in God's care and keeping. In spite of their faults and shortcomings, they are counted among what we call the communion of saints. To belong to this great company of the redeemed is to be bound together with both the living and the dead in our common faith in Christ.

As a community of faithful believers in Christ, they did their part in living the example of Christ. When we speak of someone having a transparent personality, it means that what we see is who they are. They are like the transparent stained glass that reveals light of Christ. It is their very transparency and personal integrity that makes them authentic. Each time we gather here for the Eucharist, we are surrounded with this great a cloud of witnesses who have gone before us. We are numbered among the saints of God because we have responded to the call to be God's own. It is humbling to be part of that vast throng that only God can number.

Who are we? We have different political and social views, different nationalities and colors, genders and sexual orientations. The face of Christ is seen in people of wealth and position who use their power to ease the lot of the poor and dispossessed. His face is seen in street people who come to meals served in downtown churches, carrying all their worldly goods in shopping bags, and who, but for the grace of God, could be any one of us. In the end, we all face God's judgment based not on what we did or did not do, but on who we were.

What makes our calling holy is our willingness to live the example of Jesus the laborer who gives dignity to work; Jesus the preacher who makes God's love real; Jesus the prophet who resists the establishment; Jesus the servant who is a man for others.

We read in the gospel how blessed and happy are those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn; those who are meek, those who hunger and thirst to be in a right relationship with God; those who are merciful and pure in heart; and those who are makers of peace. To be poor in spirit is to know how much we need God. We all mourn the losses in our lives, whether our friends, parents, spouses or children, as well as our marriages, our self esteem or livelihood. True

meekness and humility is measured more by our attitude than in anything we say or do. If we have to tell people we are humble, we're not. The peacemakers of this world are those who work for reconciliation among all people, beginning with themselves. They know that peace is not just the absence of conflict; but the reconciliation of those alienated and in conflict with each other.

You probably have never thought of yourself as a candidate for sainthood. In our deepening commitment to allow Christ to enter into the center of our lives, we are numbered among the saints of God when we commit to apply our faith in the everyday. The voices and faces of the great heroes of faith are different, stronger, quieter and more radiant. They begin where most of us leave off. While we may never have the depth of their spirituality and service, they are remembered for focusing their attention on others.

The saints among us are those who illuminate the message of the gospel in refreshing ways. They witness to the fact that a working faith means having confidence in the things we can neither prove nor understand. If there is any common trait or characteristic to emulate in the saints, it is their courage, perseverance and ability to envision possibilities for a better world and who willing to be part of making that happen.

The world is truly made bright by these saints of God and there is no reason why we can't be one too.