

**A Sermon Preached
at
St. George's Madrid
by
The Reverend Canon John W. Kilgore, M.D.
3 November 2019
All Saints Day
Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18
Psalm 149
Ephesians 1: 11-end
Luke 6: 20-31**

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Today is All Saints Day, that major feast day in the church year when we celebrate, revere, remember, and hopefully, exemplify the saints in our Christian heritage. The feast day has its origin in the second and third centuries when the focus was primarily on celebrating those who had either been imprisoned for their faith or martyred for it. The earliest records of the feast are in the 3rd century by Gregory Thaumaturgus, and in the 4th century by St. John Chrysostom. They both mention a festival of All Saints. But it wasn't until the Emperor Constantine made Christianity legal in the 4th century that the church was able to openly remember its heroes, and the day thus became a time to celebrate the saints. In England All Saints Day was celebrated as early as the 8th century, on 1st November, the beginning of Celtic Winter. The Celts believed that on the Eve of All Saints, the 'wall' between the living and the dead thinned, allowing the dead to come back and mingle among the living, especially those who had died during the previous year. It was celebrated as a feast, with food set out for the ghosts and they were then led out of town by masked villagers dressed in costumes representing the souls of the dead. Thus the celebration of Halloween! There is actually a triduum here — All Hallows' Eve (Halloween), All Saints Day, and All Souls Day. An important time in our Christian Year.

So, All Saints Day... What is All Saints Day? What is a saint? And who are the saints? *Synthesis*, a religious commentary I like, says "All Saints Day is the Church's Memorial Day. We remember today those who have lived and died in the faith. We remember not only the great heroes, heroines, [and] martyrs — but also the countless host of believers in every age. The day challenges us, as living members of the Body of Christ, to live into the faithfulness, obedience, and dedication of those who have passed before us into eternal life." To live into the faithfulness, obedience, and dedication of those gone before us... Who comes to your mind when you think of such people?

What is a saint? Google, that current bastion of repository of knowledge and, today almost a replacement for the Oxford Dictionary, defines a saint as 'a person acknowledged as holy or virtuous and regarded in the Christian faith as being in heaven after death'. It also has a second definition of a 'very virtuous, kind, or patient person.' And Nathan Soderblom, a Swedish clergyman and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1930, says saints are persons who make it easier for others to believe in God. I really like that definition, a saint is a person who makes it

easier for others to believe in God. Shouldn't all we Christians be doing that, making it easier for others to believe in God?

So who are the saints? Initially coming to mind may be such notable examples as St. Francis of Assisi, St. Benedict of Nursia founder of monasticism as we know it, here in Spain St. Teresa of Avila, Mother Teresa who lived during our lifetimes and was recently made a saint. And Cardinal, John Henry Newman, famous Anglican priest converted to Roman Catholicism and made saint just a few weeks ago by Pope Francis, who, in all likelihood, will himself be canonized soon after his death.

Who are saints? *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* makes the point that "From very early times the word 'saint' came to be applied primarily to persons of heroic sanctity, whose deeds were recalled with gratitude by later generations..." but also says, "...in the New Testament, the word 'saints' is used to describe the entire membership of the Christian community..." The entire membership of the Christian community. That's you and me...

In our gospel reading today, Jesus talks about saints and saintly life when He says, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh..." And then, unlike Matthew's beatitudes (in the Sermon on the Mount, this passage from Luke being called the Sermon on the Plain) he pairs his four blessings with four woes: poor/rich; hungry/full; weeping/laughter; rejections/acceptance. But Jesus then adds the epitaph — Do to others as you would have them do to you.

So who are saints? Brother Luke Ditewig of SSJE in Boston has recently written, "Who are the saints in your family of faith? Who washed your feet, showed you God's love? Going back further, who formed them? Whether or not you know their names or stories, give thanks for your spiritual ancestors today. They surround us in the great cloud of witnesses and keep pointing us to Jesus." I ask you to ponder who in your life you consider a saint? And how does that inform the way you live?

Jesus tells us in our gospel reading today to 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you...turn the other cheek...give not only your coat but also your shirt...give to every one who begs from you...' And, 'do to others as you would have them do to you.' The Golden Rule.

Who has done that for you? Who are your saints? Another Anglican monk, Brother Mark Brown has written, "Whatever the saints have, we also have, I think they are just more aware of it. The loving kindness of God is not something 'out there' to strive for, but is something 'in here' to become aware of.'

How does that inform the way we live? It is up to us to live saintly lives. Mother Teresa, now a saint, put it best when she said, "Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness: kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile." And I like to add, let them see the glory of God there!

Again from Synthesis, 'True sainthood is this willingness to *be the Christ* in the midst of whatever world we find ourselves.'

We are all saints. All of us. That we are all saints, that it is ingrained in us was wonderfully reflected to me this past Friday when we celebrated All Saints Day with a special observance of our Friday Eucharist. Due to a scheduling snafu, the St. John's Community were worshipping in the sanctuary at the same time we were to be there. So we held our service outside under the fig tree. It was glorious and there were 18 of us there! As I was consecrating the bread and wine for communion I was struck by something that truly showed the saintliness inherent in each one of us. When the priest prays we take what is called the *orans* posture. We put our arms out like this — that is the way Jesus prayed and is the very ancient Jewish tradition of prayer; arms out. And as I was in the *orans* posture, I looked out at the congregation and four year old Enzo, he and his mother from South Africa, was mirroring my gesture. He was in the *orans* posture! Smiling at me. And it was lovely. There is saintliness inherent in all of us. We just have to let it out...

Jesus tells us how to do that, over and over. And summarizes it in our gospel reading today 'Do to others as you would have them do to you.' Mother Teresa tells us to be the living expression of God's kindness: in our face, in our eyes, in our smile. Kindness.

When you meet people...see a saint!
When you greet people...love a saint!
When people see you...show them a saint!

Amen.