

All Saints Sunday 2019: Heroic

The Reverend Paul D. Allick, The Church of the Advent, November 3, 2010

I've noticed over the years how the Feast of All Saints has become less and less about the saints we celebrate on the Church Calendar and more and more about our departed loved ones.

That does not happen here at Advent because we observe All Souls Day. But in the mainstream parishes I've served All Saints has been smooched together with All Souls. The trend is to pray for all the departed on All Saints.

This trend is also reflected now in the official Church Calendar. More and more people are being added to our calendar of commemorations without much process or discernment. It used to take a six-year process and many criteria for a person to be recognized by the whole Church.

In my opinion, the current criteria has become tenuous. Being a compassionate person, or representing a political or social perspective a Christian Saint does not make!

Having said that, looking in the other direction, some Christians so separate our brothers and sisters on the Calendar from our everyday experience as disciples of Jesus that we forget an important reality: Everyone baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a saint of God. The people we call Saints with a capital "S" were ordinary sinners just like us. They are not demi-gods to be worshipped alongside God Almighty.

They were ordinary sinners who did extraordinary things. All these lives woven together with ours. All these exceptional disciples we remember week after week help us keep at the work God has given *us* to do.

Just like the heroes of Holy Scripture, these disciples became great despite their human limitations. They became right with God, that is righteous, by following the Lord with heroic faith. They took risks. They prayed and struggled to follow God's will. As the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it, they are for us a "great cloud of witnesses." We ought not forget that life for them has changed not ended. They are still praying with us and for us.

As provided in our book called Lesser Feasts and Fasts, these are the primary traits we look for when placing someone on the Calendar for the whole Church to commemorate: heroic faith (against all odds), love, goodness of life, joyousness (too many dour Christians), service to others for Christ's sake (different than being a humanitarian), devotion, recognition by the faithful, and historical perspective. (Lesser Feasts and Fasts, pp.461-463)

I wonder if you connect with any of those traits? Someone you know? Who are the potential saints with a capital "S" among us today?

Each of us at our baptism were added to the great cloud of witnesses. Today is a day to evaluate the condition of our sainthood. How is it developing? How exactly are we being transformed into the likeness of Christ? How are we individually advancing the mission of the Church?

Today is the day to ask, is my faith noticeable to others? Do I have a deep inner joy because of knowing Jesus? Am I loving others as he has loved me? How much of my life am I spending in devotion to God?

Each of us is called to holiness, to partake in the divine life, to enter into the joy of the Trinitarian Life where all is reconciled and love is perfected.

And how we get there is just as paradoxical as the death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We just heard in the Gospel today how to we become beatified? It is about overcoming death with life.

We are blessed when our spirits are faint and we are mourning and, yet, we still hope. We are blessed when we are humble and kindhearted. Meekness is a virtue not a weakness. We are sanctified when we work to make peace when the cultural message is to live for yourself and demean those with whom we differ. We are blessed when we hunger to be right with God and each other despite the temptation to be made right in our own eyes.

As we head to the baptismal font today to renew our Covenant with God, we are going to ask our beloved sister and brother Saints to pray for us, to cheer us on as we renew our life in Jesus.

We are all in this together. We are all being sanctified as one. We are responsible to and for each other. We have a mission to reconcile all people to God and each other in Christ.

Saints preserve us! Lord have mercy upon us!

