

All the saints

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in Emmanuel Episcopal Church, West Roxbury, Massachusetts, on All Saints' Sunday, November 1, 2015.

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 people of God. Saint is from the Latin, Sanctus, referring to that which is holy, sacred and set apart. When Saint Paul sends greetings in his letters to the churches he organized, he addresses all of them as "the saints."

Today, we remember all the saints of God, both good and not so good, who have been part of our lives. Some achieved great things and were held in great esteem while others led rather ordinary lives going about their daily tasks. There are those who are remembered with fondness and love while others may be recalled with sadness, even bitterness. Some were more faithful than others. The great heroes of God are remembered in story, stone, woodcarvings, paintings and stained glass while others have vanished from memory with no memorials or monuments. We aspire to the examples of those we remember for the good effect they had on our lives. God touched them in various ways and they serve as an inspiration to us. Those remembered in history were transformed by their encounters with God and led extraordinary lives of service. They took whatever task God gave them and did it willingly, if not perfectly. Those who led ordinary lives are no less good examples for their faithfulness in daily tasks and duties.

On this day we remember the saints of God who are no longer with us for whom we pray, not because we can do anything for them, but because we still hold them in our love. We take comfort in knowing that their souls are in God's care. We remember them in spite of their faults and shortcomings because they are counted among those that the creeds refer to as "the communion of saints." To belong to this great company of the redeemed is to be bound together with them for eternity in our common faith in Christ. They all endeavored to emulate the life of Christ, however imperfectly.

When we speak of someone having a transparent personality, we mean that they are authentic. What we see is who they really are. Some were like statues to which we look up while others were like stained glass that let the light of Christ shine through them. Their personal integrity gave them character and authenticity. Each time we gather here at the altar, we are surrounded with that great cloud of witnesses of the saints in light. We are bound together with those who have gone before us as God's own. It is humbling to be part of that vast number of saints whom we see no longer who know God face to face.

Who are we? We have different social and political views, different nationalities and colors, genders and sexual orientations. The face of Christ is seen in street people who carry all their worldly goods in shopping bags who come for meals served in downtown churches and who, but for the grace of God, could be any one of us. His face is seen in those of wealth and influence who use their power for easing the lives of the poor and dispossessed. In the end, we all face God's judgment based on who we are deep down inside.

What makes our calling holy is our response to the call to follow Jesus the laborer who gives dignity to work, Jesus the preacher who makes God's love real, Jesus the prophet who resists the establishment and Jesus the servant, our best example of humility. It is Christ Jesus who teaches us how blessed and happy are the 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 our need of God. To mourn the losses in our lives, whether friends, parents, spouses or children, marriage, self-confidence or livelihood is to be comforted in knowing that we are upheld by God's strong presence. True meekness and humility are measured more in our attitude than in anything we say or do. If we are truly humble and self-effacing, we don't have to say so. People will know. The peacemakers of this world are those who work for reconciliation among

all people, beginning within themselves. Peace is not just the absence of conflict; it is the reconciliation of those alienated from each other and within themselves.

You probably have never thought of yourself as a candidate for sainthood, but as we deepen our commitment to Christ at the very center of our lives, however imperfectly, we are numbered among the saints of God. Every selfless act, every time we do something for someone who can't do anything for us, every time we emulate Christ in what we say and do, we are numbered among the saints. 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. We may never have the depth of their spirituality and service, but whenever we focus our attention on others, we are doing the work of the saints.

The saints among us are those who illuminate the message of the gospel in refreshing ways. They witness to having a working faith with confidence in the things we can neither prove nor understand. If there are any common traits or characteristics among the saints, it is their courage, their perseverance and their ability to envision the possibilities for a better world and their willingness 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.