

All Saints Sunday  
Rev. Timothy C. Linstrom  
Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit, Lincolnshire, Illinois

November 3, 2019

Today is All Saints Sunday, the day each year when we turn our focus to the saints of the church, those great role models of faithful discipleship who now enjoy everlasting life with God. And we honor their memories as we light candles of remembrance and celebrate their influence in our lives.

But in our Bible readings for today, the emphasis is clearly on the saints who are still living right here on earth. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes, “I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints.” Whenever Paul speaks of saints, he is talking about members of the church, people who’ve been chosen by God and set apart to do his work in the world. According to Paul, saints are holy people, but their holiness doesn’t come from being better than others or from achieving some kind of moral perfection. Instead, their holiness comes from being claimed by God as God’s people. God “chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world,” insists Paul, “to be holy and blameless before him in love.”

God chose us and set us apart – this is such an important insight into claiming our place as saints. We know that God is holy because God is set apart from the world, and different from everything he has created. If we follow that logic, we discover that WE are holy because God has set us apart from the world, and given us a mission that’s different from anything else on earth. To be holy is not necessarily to be better than other people. Just different.

Paul says that we’re saints because we are in “Christ Jesus,” with a mission to produce a “Harvest of Righteousness that comes through Christ.”

The challenge for us...is to live a sainted life, among all those other saints who are at work in the church and the world.

And Paul gives us some clues about how to live such a life. He writes, “I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.”

So one of the ways of living the life of a saint, is to have faith in the Lord Jesus. This means trusting that Jesus is the way to God, but at the same time taking seriously that this way to God is a lifetime journey. Researcher and author Diana Butler Bass reports that at Phinney Ridge Lutheran Church in Seattle, newcomers are invited to take part in a program called “The Way”, a process that is not a quick membership class, but is instead a full year of mentoring and Christian formation. The goal is to help people come into a living relationship with Jesus that takes over the very center of their life. John Henderson, one of the participants says, “The Christian life is a life of continuing invitation, a life in which Christ calls us to follow.” That’s what saints do, plain and simple – they follow Jesus on the way to God.” Another participant said, “I don’t always understand all that we’re being taught, and I have to admit, sometimes I’m not paying

attention, but I've learned how important it is to show up, and just be with Jesus, and these people. Jesus is doing incredible things in our community." Again, that's what saints do, plain and simple – they follow Jesus on the way to God.

Another way of living the life of a saint is having love toward all the saints. In the first days of the church, the saints were part of a community of love and concern, one in which love was demonstrated by acts of practical service. One of the first things the early Christians did was to organize a diaconate to make certain that widows and the needy got some relief. "Contribute to the needs of the saints," Paul wrote to the Romans, "extend hospitality to strangers." In 1st Timothy we read, "Widows in the Christian community were commended for showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, and helping the afflicted." Paul also spearheaded a collection for the church in Jerusalem, and described it as a special ministry to the saints.

Here at Holy Spirit we too are showing love for all the saints as we are currently engaged in a Thanksgiving food drive, and we gather winter clothes and toys for those in need with Angel Tree Ministries, we give to world hunger, we give to AMMPARO for the sake of refugees, we give to Lutheran Social services of Illinois. Today, as in the earliest days of the church, love needs to be more than a word, more than an emotion – it needs to be an act of practical service.

These first two qualities – faith and love – are present in a saint, in a person who has been chosen by God and set apart to do his work on the world.

The third quality of living the life of a saint is a spirit of wisdom and revelation. This is a quality we can enjoy right here and now. Paul wrote, "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power." People who are saints in this life assume that God is already ahead of them, not stuck behind them, and they are constantly seeking to learn what God is revealing to them.

A great example is in our gospel lesson where Jesus is making a remarkable revelation to his disciples. He turns what our world values, upside down. He blesses all the have-nots of the world, the poor, the hungry, those who mourn and those who are persecuted. And he pities those who are rich and full and laughing, and who are spoken well of.

Woes are promised to all of us who are well off, respected, secure, not simply because we have such security and respect, but because it inevitably binds us, with an almost irresistible power, to this eon, to things as they are. And Blessings are promised today to all of us who are without security and popularity, who are mourning in body and soul. And they are promised not simply because we lack so much, but because the very fact

of our lacking and our sorrows may turn our hearts away from things as they are, toward the coming age.

The Beatitudes do not glorify those who are poor and in misery because they are poor. The Woes are not promised to those who are rich and secure, because they are rich. If this were so, Jesus could not have promised to the poor the reversal of their situation. He praises the poor in so far as they live in TWO worlds, the present world and the world to come. And he threatens the rich in so far as they live in only ONE world, the world of the present.

This brings tremendous tension into our lives. We live in two orders, one of which is the reversal of the other. The COMING order is always coming! It shakes our world today, and we fight with it, conquering it, and being conquered by it. The coming order is always at hand. But we can never say it is here! It is there! We can never grasp it. But we can be grasped BY IT. And whenever we are grasped by it, we are rich, even if we are poor in this age. Our wealth is in our participation in the age to come.

A generation or two ago, entertainer Gracie Allen said, "Never put a period where God has placed a comma," and this simple insight has served to rejuvenate and restore many churches and missions. Rather than stop as a period suggests, a comma causes us to pause, but then carry on. God is not finished yet.

In the greatest story ever told, Jesus ends up dying on a cross. Many placed a period on that day, for the messiah, the hope for a new world was dead. But on the third day, Jesus Christ overcame the powers of death and the devil, and rose again. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead!

So Never put a period, where God has places a comma, because God is leading us into the future of new wisdom, new revelations, new understandings, new insights. Don't put a period where God has placed a comma – saints take this seriously as they look for new revelations every day.

The spirit of wisdom and revelation knows the hope to which God has called us, the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and the immeasurable greatness of his power. We don't have to die and go to heaven before we can have wisdom – we can have it in this world. All we need are:

Faith in the Lord Jesus  
Love toward all the saints  
And a spirit of wisdom and revelation

These are the keys to a sainted life.

Today we celebrate the lives of all those who have gone before us, who lived their lives in faith and are now enjoying everlasting life in heaven, but we also celebrate YOU, the

saints that continue on their journey to that ultimate end. May we all be blessed and fruitful until the Day of the Lord. Amen.