

“Living Saints”

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Sunday, November 4, 2018

Revelation 21:1-6; Matthew 5:1-12

All Saints Day is a time to remember the saints who have gone before us.

It is also a time to take stock of who we are here today: Living saints.

Some saints, like Francis of Assisi, Joan of Arc, Peter, Paul and Julian of Norwich are known to us by their places in history.

Other saints are the ones we have known personally. Those who have touched our lives and made us better or stronger or more faithful or kinder.

Sometimes this day can bring sadness as we remember those who won't be at the Thanksgiving table this year. Sometimes it brings joy through happy memories of one who loved us well and taught us how to love.

But the bottom line is this: All it takes to be a saint is to belong to God. Being part of God's perfect covenant full of imperfect souls, is a gift. But like all gifts, we must be willing to unwrap it, try it on, and claim it as our most precious possession.

Because we have the freedom to give up our gift, our birthright of sainthood, some people find it more enticing to seek after less lovely gifts in this world.

Think of it like this: We have been a prisoner in a cage. One day the door is opened, and we receive our freedom. We must walk out of the cell in order to be free.

What if we had the winning lottery ticket to the gigantic jackpot a couple of weeks ago? We must turn in the ticket to receive the money.

If you are sitting here today, there is a good possibility you know you belong to God. You are a living saint. We all are. We have the privilege “to be” saints in the world. “To be” is a verb – an action word, like “love.”

We heard the beautiful image of heavenly living in the book of Revelation today. God promises to dwell with us. Imagine God circulating as if at a divine wedding, passing out drinks and greeting each of us with a loving embrace and an eternal welcome to the everlasting celebration.

We also heard the Beatitudes this morning. The Beatitudes tend to be one of those passages that is so well known, the luster has worn off. The shine is gone. It's like the Lord's Prayer. If we don't pay attention to each word, and say them like we mean them, they are just words.

The beatitudes remind us that we are living saints. I've taken the liberty to re-write them like this:

You are completely loved and redeemed. Go love the people who are easy to love, and also those who mightily get on your nerves.

Being poor in spirit means you possess the riches of heaven. You see God more clearly and you know what treasure is.

There will be times when you walk in a vale of tears. You will mourn. Take heart, dear ones, you will be comforted. Your tears will be wiped away and you will have the strength to comfort others.

Meekness isn't weakness. It's the quiet strength that moves the Good News forward.

There will be many days (actually, almost every day) when your appetite will be solely for justice and righteousness in an unjust and unrighteous world. Your soul will be starved for goodness. Take heart, God's pure justice and righteous will reign. Your hungry soul will be filled with an extravagant meal of a world made right.

You have been shown mercy. Perhaps even when you didn't deserve it. God works that way. Be merciful to those who try your patience and have the greatest needs. Be merciful to anyone with tears in their eyes.

You have a purity of heart. You were born with it. This doesn't mean you are a gullible fool. It means you see the Holy in others.

You are blessed when you turn swords into ploughshares. This means you find creative ways to bring peace to the world around you. All who strive for peace wear the nametag, "Child of God."

Persecutions, like being bullied, being hated, or being lied about – for righteousness' sake – are the effects of evil and cruelty. You are truly blessed when you give every breath you have to make the world an equitable place where peace reigns.

Heaven awaits with rewards too wonderful to imagine. All good saints and prophets are there cheering you on.

We celebrate All Saints Day with the knowledge that a national election is two days away. Our country has been through a few trials in the last couple of years. We are seeing people who choose to live in the prison of hate and bigotry, which is definitely a small, dark place of captivity.

We also see those who have stepped from the cell of fear, taken the lottery winnings, and are spending their lives sharing the wealth and goodness with the world around them.

We have a choice.

I personally believe living as a saint is not just who we are called to be, but it is a joyful and holy way to live. Not the boring, somber, solemn holy – but the happy, hopeful, Hallelujah! Holy.

We have the freedom to be living saints, to live in fervent joy.

A living saint walks fearlessly into the darkness knowing someone left the light on to guide them home.

A living saint speaks truth to power knowing the truth always wins, no matter how evil the power.

A living saint risks all to welcome the stranger, to give cold water to the thirsty, to share good meals with the hungry, to find safe homes for the homeless, to seek medical care for the sick, and to give hope to the prisoner locked in a cage.

So, to the saints of God, each and every one of us:

May we live sprinkling and spilling the love of Jesus Christ wherever we go.

May we share the Good News redemption stories of God our Creator

May we live as Holy-Spirit-Peacemakers, marching into our warring world with acts of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Don't you love the Fruits of the Spirit?)

For we are the living saints of the halls of heaven. Let's act like it!

Amen.