

**A homily preached by the Rev. Robert L. Tate, Priest Associate, on All Saints' Sunday, November 6, 2011, at the Philadelphia Cathedral.**

(Sing) "I sing a song of the saints of God, patient and brave and true, who toiled and fought and lived and died for the Lord they loved and knew. And one was a doctor, and one was a queen, and one was a shepherdess on the green; they were all of them saints of God and I mean, God helping, to be one too."

Other than Christmas Carols, that is probably the first hymn I ever learned by heart. I remember singing it in Sunday School when I was three or four years old. It is still one of my favorite hymns. It was good theology then and it is still good theology today.

Today is the Sunday After All Saints' Day, often called All Saints' Sunday. November 1<sup>st</sup>, All Saints' Day, is one of the seven Major Feasts in the Liturgical Year, and one of the Days reserved for baptisms. On All Saint's Day we remember those who have died during the previous year. And on All Saints' Day we also celebrate our incorporation, through our own baptism, into the Communion of Saints. Because many people are unable to attend services during the week, since the Middle Ages, the church has made All Saints' a movable feast, allowing it to be observed on the following Sunday.

In the New Testament, the word "saint" originally referred to any baptized person. But gradually, over centuries, the term was applied to people who had lived particularly heroic or virtuous lives. During the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church introduced elaborate procedures by which a person could be "canonized," officially recognized as a saint. And gradually All Saints' Day became more focused on those officially recognized as saints. In reaction to this, in the year 996, at the monastery of Cluny, in France, the observance of All Souls' Day was instituted on the day after All Saint's Day, All Souls' Day, a day to celebrate all the faithful departed.

By the time of the Protestant Reformation, there were extraordinary abuses associated with the commemoration of the departed and the invocation of saints. Martin Luther decried the practice of selling indulgences, which were essentially eternal life insurance policies, which guaranteed that your dead relatives would be released from purgatory and be admitted to heaven. It was actually one of the most brilliant marketing strategies in history. Priests and monks all over Europe became sales agents, selling something which cost nothing, receiving a percentage of the action, with the bulk of the money supposedly directed towards the renovation of St. Peter's Church in Rome.

The Reformed Churches repudiated the theology of purgatory and the invocation of saints. If you take a look at the Articles of Religion of the Episcopal Church, which are printed in the back of our Prayer Book, Article XXII, "on Purgatory," says, "The Romish doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping and Adoration, as well of Images as of Relics, also Invocation of Saints, is a fond thing, vainly invented,

and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God.” That’s strong language!

In the Anglican Communion, our Calendar of Saints only includes persons mentioned in the Bible. We do not have a process by which people are canonized. We do recognize those who have lived extraordinary, heroic, faithful lives, and we remember them on the Calendar of Lesser Feasts and Fasts as days of optional observance. If you come to the noon weekday Eucharist here at the Cathedral, Monday through Friday, we will often be observing a day of remembrance for one of these saintly people.

So essentially, the Anglican Communion has returned to the original Biblical understanding of what it means to be a saint: all those, who by virtue of their baptism into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ have inherited the promise of eternal life. So today we celebrate all saints, those saints whose faith was recognized by others, and those saints whose faith was known perhaps only to God.

In the gospel passage for today we heard the beatitudes, Jesus teaching the crowds how to live blessed, happy, saintly lives:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Pretty straight forward.

For as long as I can remember, we have had this plaque hanging in our kitchen. It says:

“Why were the saints saints? Because they were cheerful when it was difficult to be cheerful, patient when it was difficult to be patient: and because they pushed on when they wanted to stand still, and kept silent when they wanted to talk, and were agreeable when they wanted to be disagreeable. That was all. It was quite simple and always will be.”

Since we are in the middle of our stewardship season here at the Cathedral, let me add one more saintly characteristic. Saints are generous when it is hard to be generous.

Saints are generous with their spirit. Saints are generous with their time. And saints are generous with their money.

My fellow saints, please show forth your generosity by filling out a pledge card today and either placing it in the offering basket or returning it by mail this week to the parish office.

Nothing will make your life more blessed, happy, and saintly than giving back a portion to God through the mission and ministry of this Cathedral.

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