

## Sermon All Saints/Souls 2014

Wasn't that a great opening hymn and procession? It's one of our old traditional hymns and it just wouldn't feel like All Saints Day without it. Having a good corps of Choristers, Acolytes, Lectors, LEM's, a Deacon and Priest circumscribing our sacred space means we are getting down to business on the festival day.

In a way we are acting out the picture described in the Revelation to John. Peoples of all kinds standing before God joining with the Angels and Saints singing, "Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." Sounds like a festive, high-church liturgy to me!

Today is a day set aside in the church year to remember the saints and souls who have gone before us. As the Salvation Army folks say, "gone to glory". What we celebrate when we celebrate All Saints is not the superhuman faith and power of a select few. Rather we stand in awe of God's ability to use flawed people to do divine things. We celebrate all on whom God has acted in baptism, sealing them, as Ephesians says, with the mark of the promised Holy Spirit.

Many we know by name, like St. Dymphna, Virgin and Martyr, the daughter of a 7th century pagan Irish petty king. After her Christian mother died, her father became

mentally ill and deranged. He sought to replace his wife with his daughter who so resembled her mother and in his grief lusted after Dymphna. She escaped to Belgium and while there built a hospital for those suffering from mental and emotional illness. This was remarkable understanding for that time of people troubled in such a way. Legend has it that she could cure people by just being near them. Eventually, her father traced her down by the coins she used to care for the sick from her dowry. He confronted her; again she denied him and in a rage he cut off her head. She was just 15 years old.

In The Book of Common Prayer we have prayers and scripture readings for all sorts of people. Martyrs, Missionaries, Pastors, Theologians, Teachers, Monks and Nuns, and just to be safe any saint whosoever. But if we are not sure about the sanctity of someone, we have the same stuff appointed for Commemorating all the Faithful Departed on November 2.

Many of you have come here today to honor someone you have loved who has died. Your hearts are heavy with the loss of someone dear. Many of us have our own beloved dead to remember this day. People who we'd frankly rather still have here in this room as a living person. We'd rather be standing behind them in line for communion than adding them to the litany of saints.

Whether they are remembered as saints or souls by us, ultimately God has the final word. Death never has the final word because in both life and death we are connected to God and to one another.

The letter to the Ephesians we heard earlier calls this *the inheritance of the saints*, that God somehow gathers us all up into the divine love of Christ and makes us one community, united into one mystical body both now and in the life to come. That even those whose names are eventually forgotten are always and forever held in the light of God in glory. Because while death is a wrenching painful reality to us, it's meaningless to God.

When we gather together around the altar, we share in a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. We give thanks that we are tied to the whole communion of saints – united with all who have ever received bread and wine and told it was Jesus and it was for them. We are joined here with angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim – we are joined with the church on earth and the church in heaven and all who have called on the name of God. And we are connected to God.

One of the hymns today begins with the words, “Who are these like stars appearing...” The names we will shortly read are only a portion of many lists being read in churches across the city, the diocese, this country and around the world. People like Mike Moon who died too

soon in distress and despair, Robin Williams whose gift of laughter could not dispel anxiety and depression in himself, my Uncle Henry who in old age was ready to join his beloved wife, Mona Knuth and the Bogvilos who left money to Trinity to help us carry on in the Church they loved.

They are "invisible onlookers," as we continue the noble traditions that they have bequeathed to us. We are here today because of their faith. We gather here in this place because they have gone before us and believed, preached, taught and lived the Gospel. We today have faith because those who have gone before us were faithful.

The Words of Jesus in the Gospel today are often called the Beatitudes. They are chosen for All Saints/ Souls as a proclamation of the blessings that await those who are faithful even when under strain and suffering. They are filled with hope and packed with meaning.

If you play around with the word beatitudes you can re-phrase it to: *an attitude of how to be*. "One of the most important qualities in life is your attitude. The remarkable thing is that we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace as things unfold for the day. We cannot change our past. We cannot change the fact that people will act in certain way. We cannot change the

inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the 'string' we have, and that is our attitude.”

“I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% of how I react to it,” to quote Charles Swindoll.

I think that one of clues, if we want to know that we are in the presence of a saint, is their attitude.

We read and hear the platitudes about attitudes, and most of those platitudes are true. We hear the question: “Is the glass half empty or half full?” The answer to that question reveals a fundamental attitude of the person answering the question.

We know that attitude is more powerful than education. You can be highly educated and yet have a crummy attitude and not be able to solve the problem in front of you.

Attitude is a more powerful force than money. You can have all the money in the world, but you cannot buy happiness inside your soul. Some of the economically poorest people have the greatest attitude.

Attitude is more powerful than circumstances. I have learned it long ago; it is not what happens to you but what you do with what happens to you that is important. Over time, tragedies can make you bitter or better.

Attitude is more important than failures. We have heard stories of the many famous people who failed miserably in their lives such as Abraham Lincoln who lost all those elections before winning the presidency. Attitude is much more important than the failures we have all experienced.

Attitude is more important than successes. Success can go to your head and you lose your drive. All you have to do is meet a successful athlete who has recently signed a huge contract and watch his performance go down the hill.

Attitude is more important than appearance. We know the most beautiful people in the world, and that doesn't make much difference in the long run. Besides, time takes its toll on the physical beauty of everyone.

Attitude is more powerful than giftedness, skill or talent. You can buy the most talented team of baseball players, football players, basketball players, but the team that wins usually has talent plus a winning, dedicated attitude. A talented team cannot win without the right attitude.

In the next few weeks as we head into the holidays we will be hearing about Thanksgiving, and developing our own Attitude of Gratitude. It ties into our celebration of the

saints and souls whose attitude in all things let the light of Christ shine forth.

I understand Jesus to have said: Happiness has nothing to do with wealth, education, health, job, kids, success, or failure. Inner joy has to do with the BE-attitudes, the attitudes of being, the basic attitudes for life and living.

We are all saints when we walk with Jesus. Just remember: to be a saint is to live with the BE-attitudes in your heart. Amen.