

Eph. 1:18-20; 2:19-22
Heb. 12:1-2
Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19

Nov. 7, 2021
All Saints Sunday

Give Thanks For The Saints

Last Monday was Nov. 1. Most people in the U.S. probably think of it as simply the day after Halloween. (“Halloween” actually comes from the term “all hallows eve,” meaning the eve of the commemoration of those hallowed (or holy) ones we often call “saints.”) But in Christian tradition it is known as All Saints Day; a day often overlooked in many Protestant congregations. We haven’t overlooked it here, we’ve just delayed our observance until today, so we’d be together for worship. **All Saint’s Day – or in our case here, **All Saints Sunday** - is sort of like a **Christian Memorial Day**... remembering those who lived for Christ and have gone on before us.**

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, appreciated and observed All Saints Day. In a journal entry from November 1, 1767, Wesley calls it “a festival I truly love.” On the same day in 1788, he writes, “I always find this a comfortable day.” In his journal for that day in 1789 he writes “a day that I peculiarly love.” Wesley cautioned against holding saints in too high regard. He discouraged Methodists from invoking saints in their prayers, as there is no biblical warrant for the practice.¹ Yet, he also advised against disregarding the saints altogether. **All Saints Day is an opportunity to give thanks for all those who have gone before us in the faith. We recall who we are and where we came from and the great legacy left to us by believers of years gone by. The letter to the Hebrews, chapter 12, offers encouragement to Christians as they remember that a “great cloud of witnesses” surrounds us, encouraging us and cheering us on. Every time we recite the Apostles Creed saying, “I believe in the communion of saints,” we acknowledge the saints with whom we have fellowship, on earth and in heaven.**

There’s a hymn in our Methodist hymnal, written by Charles Wesley, John’s brother, that echoes this theme. “Come, Let Us Join our Friends Above,” #709, says this:

Let saints on earth unite to sing, with those to glory gone, for all the servants of our King in earth and heaven, are one.

On All Saints Day, we recognize that we are part of a giant choir singing the same song. It is the song Jesus taught his disciples; a tune that has been sung for more than 2,000 years, in glory and on earth. Our great privilege is to add our voices to this chorus. The last verse of Wesley’s hymn reminds us: Our spirits too shall quickly join, like theirs with glory crowned, and shout to see our Captain’s sign, to hear His trumpet sound.

Our heritage is of saints famous or obscure. Last week I spoke of Martin Luther, and of course I've been talking about John Wesley. Before them were the apostles Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, and early church leaders like Polycarp, Eusebius, Athanasius, Augustine, who may be obscure in our knowledge, but who gave a sure witness to faith in Christ that left an indelible mark on our faith. We think of inspirational people with whom we worship, and those across the world we will never meet. Or the parents, or maybe grandparents, who took us to church every Sunday. We remember the pastor who prayed with us in the hospital, or in a time of family crisis, and the neighbor who shared faith and fellowship with us. Maybe it was a youth leader who guided us to faith in Jesus, or the Sunday school teacher who showered us with God's love, and those folks from church who brought us meals when we were in need. Additionally, we remember and pray for our sisters and brothers in Christ who faithfully follow Jesus in places where being a Christian is dangerous.

When we cross the threshold of faith, receiving the pardon of sin offered by God through Jesus Christ, we enter into the realm of the saints. I know that sounds funny ... we think of saints as especially holy people and/or dead, right? Nonetheless, aren't we all seeking holiness?

Some folks think they have to be a Mother Theresa in order to be saintly. Not true. Here's what she said: "Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love." And again, "Do not think that love in order to be genuine has to be extraordinary. What we need is to love without getting tired. Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies." In other words, we are simply expected to witness to our faith in Jesus Christ in all the large and small things we say and do. Our purpose is to tell of the inheritance we have obtained in Christ – membership in God's family, wrought by our redemption from sin and darkness by Christ's atoning death on the cross. Ours is to tell others of the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of His great power.

Devotional writer Oswald Chambers says it like this: "Most of us develop our Christianity along the line of our temperament, not along the line of God... We do not need the grace of God to stand crises, human nature and pride are sufficient, we can face the strain magnificently; but it does require the supernatural grace of God to live twenty-four hours in every day as a saint, to go through drudgery as a disciple, to live an ordinary, unobserved, ignored existence as a disciple of Jesus."²

We think we must do exceptional things for God; but not so. We must simply be "exceptional in the ordinary things, to be holy in mean streets, among mean people, and this is not learned in five minutes."³

When we become members of this church, we commit to five things: to be present at worship, to serve Christ and the church with our time, to give our gifts of money, to offer our prayers for the church, and to witness to our faith in Christ. The saintly life is one that allows Christ to live within so that those five commitments are consistently and earnestly fulfilled out of desire and love, rather than burdensome obligation.

That last commitment ... to witness to our faith in Christ is a hurdle for many. It says in Scripture: ***Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence, I Peter 3:15.*** Mmmm... can that really be done? Here's some suggestions to make it happen:

1 - First make sure you have truly confessed your sin and invited Jesus to be your Lord and Savior. Without Him you can do nothing. A lot of church members continue to struggle and maybe it's because their heart has not yet been "strangely warmed." If you have not yet truly and deeply surrendered to Christ, today is the day.

2 - Second pray for the Holy Spirit to go before you and to give you those words to account for your hope in Jesus.

3 - Third answer this simple question: How has Jesus made a difference in your life? Your answer is your witness for Christ. This is your defense for the hope you have in you, and your testimony to any with whom you speak.

4 - Fourth witness to your faith everyday by living a godly life. As it says: *Only live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, Philipppians 1:27.*****

So, on this day, as we commemorate the saints of Christ's church, each of us could well ask ourselves: **If every other member of First Church was like me, what kind of church would we have?**

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, Hebrews 12:1.

¹U. M. Book of Discipline, "Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church: Of Purgatory," Article XIV, ¶104.

² Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost For His Highest*, October 21.

³ Ibid.