

Surprised by Sainthood
November 3, 2013
Philippians 2:1-11

This morning's reading comes from the second chapter of Philippians. The passage speaks first of how we should live, then of how Christ lived.

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

May God bless the reading and hearing of these words from the book of Philippians.

Let us pray . . . On this All Saints Sunday, may we be enriched by the stories of those who have gone before, inspired by Jesus' example, and challenged by the call to humility. Take and use my words to empower our imaginations, awaken us to new possibilities, and embolden us in our actions. Amen.

I grew up in a saint-free world. While I went to church every Sunday, I don't recall any real mention of the saints. The little I knew of the saints, I learned from my Catholic friends. I assumed that saints were their domain.

My childhood memories are not incorrect, but they certainly don't tell the whole story. After all, we find ourselves gathered this day in a Protestant church celebrating All Saints' Day.

Is this appropriate? And, if so, how did we get here? To answer these questions we need to consider the history of this day.

All Saints' Day came about not long after Christianity was legalized early in the fourth century of the common era. According to the earliest writings, the day was a time to remember and honor the church's martyrs.

This makes sense when you realize that in the generations just before this time people were often confronted with hardship and even death for living out their faith. In fact, so many were killed that the ideal of providing a day of remembrance for each was impossible. Rather than recognize each individually, the church embraced All Saints' Day as a way to remember them all.

Like many holy days, All Saints' Day evolved over time.

The date changed.

Originally it was on the first Sunday after Pentecost. It shifted to May 13 before finally moving to November 1.

The scope changed.

Originally it was all about those who had paid the ultimate price by giving their lives for the cause of Christ. It expanded into something much bigger; it came to be a day to remember the contributions of all saints rather than just martyrs.

While we cannot possibly name all of the saints, hearing many names is helpful. Listen now as our choir guides our journey of the saints through the centuries.¹

1. Mary and Joseph, **pray for us.**
Michael and all angels, **pray for us.**
Anna, Joachim, Elizabeth, **pray for us.**
Elijah, Moses, John the Baptist, **pray for us.**
Isaac, Sarah, Abraham, **pray for us.**
Jacob, Joseph, Samuel, **pray for us.**

¹ John D. Becker. "Litany of the Saints." Oregon Catholic Press, 1987.

Ruth, David and Solomon, **pray for us.**
Isaiah, Jeremiah, **pray for us.**
All you holy men and women, **pray for us.**

2. Peter, Paul, Andrew, **pray for us.**
James, John, and all apostles, **pray for us.**
Mary Magdelene, Veronica, **pray for us.**
Barnabas, Matthias, **pray for us.**
Stephen, Philip, and Cornelius, **pray for us.**
Prisca and Aquila, **pray for us.**
Timothy and Titus, **pray for us.**
Linus, Cletus, and Clement, **pray for us.**
All you holy men and women, pray for us.

3. Lawrence and Chrysogonus, **pray for us.**
Innocent and Boniface, **pray for us.**
Hippolytus and Origen, **pray for us.**
Athanasius and Basil, **pray for us.**
Felicity, Perpetua, **pray for us.**
Cosmos and Damien, **pray for us.**
John Chrysostom and Justin, **pray for us.**
Lucy, Agatha, and Agnes, **pray for us.**
All you holy men and women, pray for us.

4. Jerome and Eusebius, **pray for us.**
Scholastica and Benedict, **pray for us.**
Ambrose, Monica, Augustine, **pray for us.**
Martin and Gregory, **pray for us.**
Clare, Francis, and Dominic, **pray for us.**
Francis Xavier, Ignatius, **pray for us.**
Elizabeth and Catherine, **pray for us.**
Louis and Wenceslaus, **pray for us.**
All you holy men and women, pray for us.

5. Lord, be merciful, **save your people.**
From all evil, **save your people.**
From every sin, **save your people.**
From everlasting death, **save your people.**
By your incarnation, **save your people.**
By your death and resurrection, **save your people.**
By your gift of the spirit, **save your people.**

Have mercy on us sinners, **save your people.**
Christ, hear us. Lord Jesus, hear our prayers.

6. Lord, give new life, **hear our prayer.**
To these chosen, **hear our prayer.**
By the grace of baptism, **hear our prayer.**
O Jesus, Son of the living God, **hear our prayer.**
Send your Spirit, **hear our prayer.**
In its fullness, **hear our prayer.**
On your sons and daughters, **hear our prayer.**
Who believe and profess you, **hear our prayer.**
Christ, hear us. Lord Jesus, hear our prayers.

Surely our faith is enriched by the stories of these saints. As we return to the story of how All Saints' Day evolved, we learn that over the next several centuries those counted as saints expanded yet again. Those we recognize this day need not be martyrs or those who have received recognition by church bodies for their incredible work.

Today we remember all of the saints we have known personally, but give special attention to those who have died this past year. With this as our focus, I invite you to join with me in the "Litany of Remembrance" printed in the bulletin.

All: Gracious God, who holds the living and the dead in your heart, we come to you now to remember those whom we have loved who died this past year.

One: We thank you for your presence in their lives and for your light that shone through them.

All: We thank you for the cycles of human life, of birth and dying, of generations past and generations yet to come, for the joy and sorrow that accompanies these cycles.

One: We thank you for your journey with us through life and death and beyond death.

All: We thank you that when we gather at your table, we commune with all your saints.

One: Come to us afresh with your Holy Spirit, as we remember:
Jane Adams - Mim Ballou - Bob Bulliment - Blair Case
Donald Clark - Coral Clifford - Arthur Cooper - Mary Cooper
David Dillon - Angelo Gallo - Gregg Glover - Don Hall
Margaret Hileman - John Honeycomb - Jack Just
Bill Kother - Lyle Oechsle - Lisan Schon - Gerry Simes
Barbara Vichotka and June Zinn.

All: Thank you for your presence, Holy God, in the lives of these persons and for your light that shone through them.

One: Let your light so shine through us that we may join them in our glory when our time comes.

All: We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. Amen.²

Those who have shared the journey with us have shown us how to live according to the way of Jesus. Surely, they are saints.

So far the story of All Saints' Day is a story of remembering those who have journeyed beyond this life to life after life.

We must not stop with them. The story of this day is incomplete unless it also includes you and me.

The New Testament writers were fond of using the word "saints" for all who follow the way of Jesus. In recent years, this reality has been recaptured as All Saints' Day has continued to broaden in scope.

How are we all saints? The answer to that question begins with the wisdom found in our Scripture reading. It starts with humility.

Surely you recall the words. Let me rephrase them in contemporary language, relying on Eugene Peterson's paraphrase:³

² Source unknown (litany used in prior years by United Church of Marco Island).

³ Philippians 2:1-8a, The Message.

If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care - then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends.

Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage.

Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself.

He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human!

Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death.

Today is All Saints' Day. It is a day to remember the saints who have gone before us, recognize the saints who surround us, and welcome the surprise role God has for each of us as saints. Amen.