

ALL SAINTS DAY
November 1, 2020

**In the name of God, who in Jesus,
taught us the meaning of unconditional Love.
AMEN**

All Saints Sunday is one of THE 4 biggest days of the Church Year and yet, I think that is often not realized. The other 3 are Christmas & Easter, of course, & the 4th is Pentecost.

We have some POWERFUL Scripture readings this morning as we celebrate All Saints Day. The first reading is familiar to many of us because it is often read at funerals, and then, of course, the Gospel has the very familiar, but very challenging Beatitudes.

If you are a serious Bible reader, I am sure you have had the experience of reading a very familiar passage from the Bible and having one particular part STAND OUT for you more than the rest. Even Martin Luther experienced that when he read, as if for the first time, that we are saved by faith, not, by works...and the impact that realization had on him effectively began the Reformation!

Well, for me, in studying this week's lectionary, the statement from the first Lesson, Revelation, that "... there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages and that they fell on their faces, worshipping God"... that is where I would like us to begin. "A multitude that no one can number." This is our Resurrection Faith! A MULTITUDE WHICH NO ONE CAN NUMBER!

We are blessed to live so near the ocean and so it is easy for us to picture the ocean in our minds even when we are away from it. Again and again the surf comes up to bathe the shoreline. It never stops. One wave after another. Haven't we all sat at some time just staring at the waves...fascinated...hypnotized? Hmm...a multitude no one can number.

I praise God that according to OUR understanding of the Book of Revelation, numbers are symbolic. Just as many other numbers and expressions in the Bible are symbolic. For example, the number 40, which is mentioned repeatedly in the Bible, did not mean exactly 40 days and 40 nights, but rather the number 40 was a well understood way of saying UNTIL THE JOB IS DONE or FOR AS LONG AS IT TAKES. Like, raining 40 days and 40 nights OR Jesus being in the wilderness for 40 days...well, that's to say, until the job was done, until the mission was accomplished. Or, take the number 7. It's hard to think of the number 7 without thinking of the FULNESS OF GOD'S LOVE. Consider the 7-fold gifts of the Spirit, or the world being created in 7 days, or our charge to forgive 70 x 7! And then there are other symbols. Obviously making ROBES WHITE by washing them in the blood of the lamb is to be understood symbolically. In fact, a lamb who does a shepherd's work is pretty clearly symbolic.

Can we count the waves that bathe the shore in one day's time, or in a year? Let us say that they symbolize the people of the earth...some loud, some soft, some far reaching, others not, some big, some small, some here, some there. Many have been on this earth before us. Before we were born ... before we even began to count, others were born and grew and worked and played and worshipped ...and moved beyond. How many? A multitude that no one can number.

CONSIDER THIS...the waters of Baptism and the sign of the Cross have bathed and marked millions who have preceded us in this our Christian way of life and who are now in the Heavenly Realm. Not just the early prophets and those who have been declared saints, but our own, our own loved ones, our family members and our friends ...those whom WE have known and loved and who now are enfolded within the Lord's Love! I hope this is a blessed consolation for anyone who grieves.

If the numbers of those who have preceded us in our Christian Way are at all like the ceaseless waves upon the shore, what about those who are right here with us? As the Church, we understand that we ARE one, as the Body of Christ, as the Church. All taken up in the oneness...in the constancy of our Lord...and in the everlasting Love of our Holy God... and in our charge to "go and do likewise."

Think of counting the waves at the shore, counting, counting, counting. But then, consider this...as Christians, we need ONLY count to ONE! There is only one Church. There is only one God. Surely the love of God in Christ, which encourages us as we journey here on earth, is like the never ending waves that bathe the shore. Unceasing and eternal love bathes us in Grace and Peace. What an awesome gift! ///// Though sin and evil abound; though we experience pain and darkness and heartache, we live in the hope, in the confidence, with the promise that, one day, with all the saints of all time, God WILL wipe away all tears from our eyes.

I mentioned The Beatitudes. I think it was Flannery O'Connor, an American novelist, who paraphrased Jesus, to say, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you ... ODD!" Nowhere is the oddness of the Christian outlook more clearly displayed than in the Beatitudes from today's Gospel. Blessed are you, says Jesus -or according to some translations, happy- when you are poor, mournful, hungry for a justice you do not see. That's hardly our society's usual definition of happiness. Who will help us discover the blessing, and who will help us live by kingdom values, if not the communion of saints, the family of faith? We need the communion of saints to remind us that we are blessed when we live as if the love of God were the most important and the most reliable reality in life. We need the community, and the community needs us. With each other's help, we can live the life to which Jesus calls us.

Did you ever think about the implications of the fact that as human beings, the God in whose image we are created is known to us as a Trinity? Relationship is at the very heart of the nature of God, and that also says something very important about us. None of us is an island. We are connected in so many ways. We are not made to live only to ourselves. We are made for relationship, both with God and with each other and God's world; and so, we live out our lives in a rather complicated and ever-changing web of associations.

We turn toward each other almost instinctively as we celebrate our joys, mourn our losses, and need support through tough times and transitions. We work together to accomplish our goals; we look to each other for reassurance that we are on the right track or for guidance if we are not. And, we scarcely ever in adulthood make a decision that does not take somebody else into consideration. We look to our parents, grandparents, and mentors for wisdom; we look to our children for zest and inspiration; we look to our friends for help in sorting through the muddle of our daily lives. None of us is an island, and thank God for that.

On the first of November every year, we in the Christian Church, remember that we are not islands, and give thanks for that in the celebration known as All Saints. And what is a saint? Well, there are those who have been especially recognized and have days named for them. But, mostly we don't recognize saints in that sense. We have a more generalized, and perhaps more idealized vision of a saint as someone who is loving, forgiving, always looking out for the needs of others. Someone who knows what God wants them to do and strives to do it.

There are other ways of describing saints. Paul's letters to the early churches often began with greetings to "those called to be saints" and those greetings were addressed to the entire congregation. The word saint in fact, simply means "holy" says a favorite theologian, Frederick Buechner. He says, "A saint is a life giver. A saint is a human being with the same sorts of hang-ups and abysses as the rest of us, but if a saint touches your life, you become alive in a new way." This is kind of like the definition you may have heard, given by a child who had been told that the figures in stained glass windows were saints. To which the little girl said, "Oh, a saint is someone the light shines through."

Well, with that definition in mind, I am thinking of the hymn we will sing later called "I sing a song of the saints of God" and it says,..." God's Love made them strong...and they followed the right ...the whole of their good lives long...and one was a soldier ...and one was a priest...One was a Priest!! Well, that makes me think of Father Ted, whose 12th year Anniversary of being our leader is today!! ((To Ted: I don't mean you are actually a saint!)) But, I do think, as the little girl said: "the light shines through him." And I do see him as always striving to do the right thing. He is constant in fairness, tireless in creating the best ways to help his flock, a priest we can trust to help us in our own struggles, a preacher who makes us reconsider God's ways of Love. He is a "man of the cloth", yes, but more than that, he is a Wounded Healer, unafraid to share his own pain as encouragement for the rest of us. And it doesn't hurt that he is good looking, married well, and I call him Friend. What a gift he is in our lives, in this church and in the community! And as Frederick Buechner put it: "He is a life-giver who causes us to think and therefore, to grow." I know you all join with me in thanking Fr. Ted for his time with us and thank God for mysteriously having orchestrated all of it!

All Saints Sunday celebrates the numbers upon numbers who have been and who are and who yet will be, following the commandments of Love and Forgiveness, of loving God with our whole hearts and our neighbors as ourselves... enfolded in God's Love forever. God's OWN forever. What a blessed assurance we have!! PRAISE GOD!

AMEN