

ALL SAINTS' SUNDAY

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Everywhere in the world, we are only one security guard away from what happened in Egypt this weekend to a group of Egyptian Christians returning from a baptism at a wilderness monastery. And it is exactly the same roots and purpose for which the Celebration of All the Saints as begun. What shall we say about our name and calling as the Parish of All Saints?

Lord, let your word only be spoken and your word only be heard. Amen.

The Gospel reading from Luke is the one that has been used from the very beginning of the celebration in the Church for All the Saints, begun in Rome officially in 609, after probably 300 or 400 years of local celebrations around the entire western and Eastern Church. In 875, it was decreed for the entire Church universal.

The same sermon by Jesus is recorded in Matthew as The Sermon on the Mount. That name gets a little confused during a Stewardship Season – which is about this time in virtually every mainline church on earth. It's just that sometimes when people aren't paying quite attention, they hear not the Sermon on "the Mount", but the sermon on the "AMOUNT," and figure they are going to hear a sermon on facts and figures and percentages.

Well, that doesn't happen so much when introducing Luke's recording of the event. It's been called the Sermon on the Plain, or on THE LEVEL.

As you heard the gospel, and read it again, you will see what is Jesus' blessings for those who show humility, and constancy, and devotion, and divine attitude; and we begin to attribute these to what we normally call the saints of Christ. And so much of a celebration of All Saints, with these gospel readings before us, will be focused on what a saint looks like, and how we might be made into one. "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." We are told these are spiritual conditions that speak to dedicated hearts of faithful followers, and through these vessels, God is able to bring the holy to our existence here on earth.

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We know for sure We certainly are not born that way. And such focus on such saints will bring certain humorous anecdotes into every sermon on being a saint. Like right now.

There were two evil brothers. They were rich and used their money to hide their despicable deeds in the community. However, they were members of the same local church and attended fairly regularly, and presented the impression of being faithful Christians. Their pastor retired and a new one was called. Being either more honest or a better judge of character than his predecessor - or both - he could see right through the brothers' deception. He was also an effective preacher and a diligent pastor. Suddenly, one of the brothers died. The day before the funeral, the remaining brother sought the new pastor out and handed him a check for \$100,000 for the church's new building campaign. "I have only one condition," he said. "At his funeral, you must say my brother was a saint." The pastor gave his word and, immediately, went to the bank and deposited the check. The next day at the funeral, the pastor did not hold back. "He was an evil man! He cheated on his wife and abused his family. He had no faith to commend. His witness was void! Then he stopped. And then, pointing to the brother, the pastor said, "But, compared to his brother, he was a saint!"

But this kind of discussion is not the root or purpose of starting a celebration of All Saints. The word Saints was attributed when it was decreed for all the Church; before then it was very clearly a way to remember, and to be encouraged, and strengthened, and to commend to God the souls of those who were simply killed for being willing to witness to Jesus Christ as Lord of all. The Martyrs. This understanding is clear from the commendation when the Pantheon in Rome was converted into a church (St Mary and all Martyrs), and 28 cartloads of martyr relics were moved from the catacombs and placed under the altar. These Martyrs unknown, were understood to be the Saints unknown, standing at the throne of the Lamb in Revelation. These are our All Saints.

When we hear about the number of Egyptian Christians who just this weekend were murdered expressly because they were Christians; of the same in Libya last year, or ongoing in northeastern Nigeria; or even last year on this same Egyptian road to a wilderness monastery after – again – having performed a baptism, we are reliving the ongoing reality of what it means to be a church dedicated to All Saints, All Martyrs. All those who will never have a name before us, those who will be so far removed from us that we cannot have had a personal relationship. Although as we all know,

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as our Treasurer John Gray III says, "We are only two handshakes away from someone of importance."

As underscored by the murders of the Synagogue members in Pittsburgh, this is why I started this sermon by saying we are only one security guard away ourselves from the same outcome, in most anything anymore, but including harm being brought because of our witness specifically as Christians. We don't want to walk into placing our lives on the line in ORDER to bear witness to Christ. But at the very least, whether with imminent death or not, we can say that bearing witness to our belief in the risen Jesus Christ can and will place us into very difficult situations.

As you read through the Sermon on the Level this morning, read it as pointing to those who in any circumstance in life are put involuntarily into the very difficult situation of life by not recanting their faith, or death. AND reading the second part of the Woes as to what will happen to those who are the offenders. Reading it in this way, it seems to come alive, doesn't it.

We will be baptizing Kim Purcell Wilder today. With the awareness of what I'm saying about martyrs, perhaps the family will decide to go elsewhere to seek baptism! But we know the grandmother, Barbara, and I know the father, Matt, and despite the manifold difficulties they have each faced in their own lives, they are not ones to turn and run. To them this will be a challenge to accept.

How do we take up our patronal DNA, and assist those raising children in the Church, as well as forming these kinds of disciples? What has to happen, then, is for this parish called All Saints' to take up the mantle of teaching, and encouragement, and sending -- sending those who are prepared to be a faithful witness in every difficult situation. That is how we take on the name All Saints or All Unknown Martyrs, for yourself. I didn't say, sending out those who will go LOOK for a difficult situation in which to be a witness to Christ. If some of you are called to missionary work -- which could be as simple as between generations -- then God bless you. But what it does mean is raising up Christians who know how to witness their faith, and are ready as St Paul said, in season and out, prepared to share the presence of Christ in them by word and deed.

Martyrs are witnesses even at their death for being a witness. There are so many, many, many, even in this century, that we will never know their names, apart from the St. Thomas' and St. Dunstan's and St. Paul's, that we have created a celebration to keep them before us -- all the other saints. We certainly continue to uphold those

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holy vessels of which we know – the icon we will bless today speaks to those first named witnesses as the apostles, and their passing on the anointing to succeeding named individuals in a succession leading to our bishops.

But truly, All Saints refers to all the other martyrs.

So here we can say with that patronal name applied to us, we all then will be witnesses in every difficult situation that comes our way and into which we may be led to honor those who have gone before. And that application will be refreshed, tragically, every time a new martyr is made and we are made aware of it.

At the annual meeting for All Saints' last year, I proposed that some missing committees be eventually created, two of them in particular. These would augment the Committee on Social Action (both inreach and outreach), and make a triumvirate of standing or permanent committees. One would be Christian Formation – of course, training up witnesses to be able to stand firm in every difficult situation. The other would be a committee on Evangelism.

Given what I've said this morning, we could almost call it the Committee on Martyrs. The problem is that it is very difficult to recruit qualified committee members to a group called the Martyrs Committee. That indeed would end up being a one-time spiritual gifting!

So perhaps you should stick with Evangelism: take the initiative to learn what situations are available, and how to look for opportunities for our parish witnesses to share who Jesus Christ is, and to reflect his glory. Even if they never get known by their own name.

Here then is your work before you, All Saints. Be diligent, and let the treasures of Heaven fill your hearts and souls, your minds and spirits, and thus strengthen you to be His people in the world, and in every situation, not shying away from the difficult situations, restoring all people to God and to each other through Jesus Christ. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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