

All Saints B

Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9, Rev. 21:1-6, John 11:32-44

I have always loved All Saints Day. The fact that we are reading three of my favorite scripture passages in one service makes it extra special. In Wisdom of Solomon we are reminded that our loved ones who have died are at peace and they shine like sparks through tinder. In The Revelation to John we are comforted by knowing that God wipes away all our tears of grief for the departed. Even now, in my old age, I can hardly read or hear the account of Jesus calling Lazarus out from the tomb without crying. It carried me through my grief after my father was died in a tractor accident in 1995.

This Sunday we carry on the Christian tradition that dates back to the third century of honoring and giving thanks to God for all the baptized saints in Christ, big “S” and little “s”, all those among us and those who have gone to greater glory before us who helped us get closer to God and understand life a little more clearly.

This past week I have been thinking about those people in my life, so far, who have helped and nurtured my faith.

I'd like to tell you about one of my God moments with a friend and mentor in the faith. I used to live in Alaska and one day(before I was ordained) I was in the church office doing some mundane paperwork when my priest, Father Dave Elsensohn came in and said "are you ready to go to the cemetery"? Now, I know living in Alaska can put years on you but I didn't think I looked that bad! But after he saw my reaction he said "Because it's All Saint's Day."

Feeling like I was put on the spot I said "O.K. I'll go , not really understanding why so I got my coat and made a bee line to the car. And Father Dave said "Let's walk instead." Well, it was November in Alaska, the wind was blowing and the rain was falling and it was Cold. But "who was I to argue with a priest on a mission", so we began to walk the four blocks up a very steep hill to the National Cemetery. We walked through the gates and Fr. Dave says "I'll see you back here in an hour or so". And I thought WHAT! I'm freezing, I'm soaked and I don't even know what I'm supposed to be doing here for an hour!

But off he went down the side walk. I thought well I can't just stand here, so I began to wander in the opposite direction.

Most graves were those of veterans who fought in more than one war and ended up dying many, many miles from home. The place was built on a cone shaped hill and as I walked around the back I could tell the people buried there were the poor, the homeless, and the tuberculosis patients. As I read tombstones I began to wonder who they were, were they native, black, white, did they have family here, some were very young and some were very old- some were taken down in the prime of life. As I walked I began to realize that something linked these departed soul's together . The majority of them had a verse from the Bible or a reference to Jesus engraved on their tombstone.

And I realized that the Word of Our Lord Jesus Christ had special meaning to them or to their relatives-why else would the scripture be carved in stone to remember them by?

After an hour I met Fr. Dave back where we parted and we were both weary and cold. We didn't talk much on the way back to church. But by

now I could guess why he wanted to spend time in the graveyard on that cold day. Someone had to pray for the forgotten saints. Saint spelled with a little “s”.

That night we had an All Saints Day , Rite 1 service. I had always loved being a lay reader at Rite One services because of the language of the prayers of the people. That night as I read the traditional prayers the phrase “thy true and lively Word” jumped out at me and struck my heart so hard I had to pause. I had read that saying “thy true and lively Word” countless times before but that day was different. I remembered those short Scripture verses I saw on the grave stones and I realized those words are what connect us (the alive) with the forgotten souls of the poor and sick as well as the most venerated souls of the most famous Christian Saints.

It’s an awesome and marvelous thought knowing that saints who have gone before us in faith heard and read the assurance in Wisdom of Solomon that their departed loved ones are at peace. And what a joy it is

to know that our ancestors were comforted by the image of God wiping away their tears at a funeral or an All Saints Day service.

And there is no doubt they heard Jesus weep and felt encouraged and strengthened by Lazarus throwing off those bindings of the grave and being made a new creation. We do indeed read the same words and receive the same Good News from and about Jesus as those who have gone before but I wonder, even though we receive the same message, Can we picture ourselves defending our faith in those words as well as Joan of Ark or David Oakerhater? Do we believe we can spread the word of God to those who haven't yet heard it just as well as St. Patrick or St. Mary? Are we capable of believing in those words so deeply that we abandon all our money and material things as happily as St. Francis of Assisi or serve the poorest of the poor as Mother Teresa?

I've listed saints from earlier times but I think most of us know someone now that just exudes the Holy Spirit while living the lively, the alive Word. And I think it is safe to say that these reverent people we know as saintly aren't out of the ordinary. I mean they aren't out standing on a

pole for decades, or living in a hole in the desert eating bugs, or living in a cell behind an altar their entire lives.

They are people engaged in this world that have read, took to heart and brought to life the Holy Scriptures in a way that IS extra-ordinary.

I know sometimes we may think we aren't as worthy as the Saints (capital S) of ancient times to be mentors in faith and spiritual guides for others. And I know sometimes we feel God hasn't given us the right gifts to spread God's word effectively as others. As far as I know, We're not genius theologians, mystics, eloquent speakers or authors, or fearless missionaries. We may not feel capable of abandoning our family and friends and entering a convent, some of us probably don't want to be hermits or spend years in regimented silence. But all of us can, by the grace of God, bring to life God's Word, just as Jesus did. That's what makes an average person a saint. The true and lively Words made flesh sitting right beside you can show you the way of love, they can comfort the grieving, reward the poor in spirit and empower the oppressed.

What I learned that All Saints day while reading Our Rite 1 Prayer is-
God's love for us spans all time and because of that Love we are all free
to be saints.

It is not the extra ordinary actions like Saints of old that deem us worthy,
it is our willingness to bring alive the Truth of the Gospel in our lives
and guide others just as the Real and Alive Word of God, Jesus the
Christ did. We ALL are the living Word of God. Amen.