

Calling ALL saints!  
The Rev. Dr. Martha Tucker  
November 3, 2019

Blessed be God who animates our lives and calls all of us to live lives of increasing holiness, humbly and lovingly, that all may be saints, all may be one. AMEN

All saints day means ALL are Saints day! We celebrate each other; we especially remember those who have gone before us. Yet we tend to deflect the spotlight away from ourselves and shine it on our ancestors, those we hope to see someday, and on those who have achieved some level of authorized saintly fame.

As a light technician at a theater might instruct, I suggest we widen the light that it flood all creation today and that we stand in that light which is after all Gods grace!

For you see I understand the tendency to deflect attention; in fact, I am respectful of your immense humility especially in the face of greatness and memories of loved ones who have already entered into glory! But I remind us that God's glory and greatness are for everyone. Our job is to recognize that and live into that fortune with humble responsibility!

When I think of the wide embrace of God for ALL saints, I am reminded of a story which Brian Doyle tells of his days in Catholic school when at All Saints day he and his classmates told the stories of the saints for whom they were named. There were stories of Marks and Marys and Lydias and Johns, Brian himself had not been named for a formal saint but for a great historical character and that story was sufficient to the priest.

But late in the telling the priest came to a boy named Luke. This should have been a simple brief exchange, but no... Now Luke was not the brightest of students but when it came to history he was an encyclopedia of facts.. and like a prodigy law student he asked a series of questions which all began with isnt it true that...

isnt' it true that all saints means all are saints

isnt it true that there are a lot of saints unknown and unrecognized

istnt it true that all things are possible with God

isnt it true that besides the known saints there might be a saint judas and a saint syrophoenician woman

and if all that is true then might it not be true that Lucifer is saint material

At the thought of saint lucifer the priest to his credit smiled and said Luke, you make a series of great points and I suppose that because of the amazing miracle performing grace of God..there might indeed be a saint lucifer

Luke was satisfied on that all saints day!

after all, all things are possible with God, ALL things

All the saints means all the saints

Doctors, lawyers, teachers, nurses, mothers, fathers, friends, mentors,

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and homeless, disenfranchised, the marginalized, the migrant, the immigrant,  
the wanderer, the children, the sinner

on all saints day we do remember our loved ones who have died in the hope of the  
resurrection

and on all saints day we remember also the foolish and the wise, the doubters and the  
believers, the broken and the whole, or as Fredrick Buechner says: the despots, the  
tossspots, the crackpots of our lives..

You get the point...all means all

Admittedly within all the saints some are famous like St Francis, or Mary the mother of  
Jesus or the Gospel authors, Matthew Mark Luke and John. Some have lived lives of  
incredible historical significance like St Joan.

But today I would like us to think about what do we of little fame have in common with  
they of immense fame. It is not a dichotomous we/they...it is a communal one. It seems  
to me that what is in common here is LOVE with a capital L. The saints known and  
unknown, the saints you and me, are called to be vessels of God's immense love.

Technically a saint to be a saint must have performed a miracle, a healing or a turning of  
water into wine type thing. And historically the miracles are big, extraordinary, almost  
unbelievable. These miracles tend to have had witnesses to attest to their actuality.

When miracles are the test, we ordinary people tend to not bother to fill out the  
application for sainthood. Today's lectionary, music, and prayer cause us to pause and  
rethink this. Perhaps our doubts and our humility are exactly what make us the right  
servants for the hiring.

Take a lesser known saint but one of my favorites, St Therese of Lisieux. Her life is  
associated with the term "little way", a modest and humble approach to the cultivation of  
holiness. She is described as having a charisma, a special gift, of wisdom and healing.  
She was characterized with words like nonadversarial, nonviolent, noncombative, and  
nonjudgemental, disarming Christian devoted qualities! In all encounters she looked for  
opportunities to cultivate love.

I recently read a wonderful insightful article comparing St Therese with the writer  
Virginia Woolf, one was in a family steeped in Catholic tradition and the other in an  
intentionally agnostic academic world. One would be assumed to be saint material due  
to her pedigree; one would not.

but it was pointed out that both sought the sacred in the everyday. Virginia Woolf did so  
by creative and imaginative ways of expressing religious experience and what she  
called "Moments of Being".

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When we think about ALL saints it is tempting to let our rational brains begin an analysis, to seek facts, to create criteria, to check boxes and to create exceptions. What is a theology of inclusion quickly becomes a theology of exclusion and merit not grace becomes the standard. certainly the killer on death row is not a saint or the shooter in a crowded theater. My response from my right brain would certainly agree with you. and in this lifetime on this earth they are no where near holiness! AND my other brain or my contemplative self would be troubled by the kernel of our faith which assures us that all things are possible with God...all things! My contemplative self would identify with the Brian Doyle story and would want to seek St. Lucifer because if Lucifer can be a saint then so might we! Our faith is based on miraculous conversions!

Not only are all things possible with God but conversion and repentance and those things which lead to forgiveness and sanctification are ours...Jesus is mine oh what a foretaste of glory divine

The threads, I think, which are woven through the communion of saints in which we believe, is loving service to God and neighbor and humility. Whether in obvious visible ways like St. Francis embracing the leper or in quieter simpler ways, the little way, like St. Therese. God's love seems to flow through them into the world and the creatures they encounter.

And if St. Therese talks about the humility, the little way, then St. Francis embodies it, not self righteousness, but simple integrated right relationship with God, grounded in the humus of Creation.

There is great hope in this inclusive view of sainthood especially when we realize that all of us created in the image of God qualify by virtue of our birth and baptism. We are baptized into the Body of Christ, we are then baptized into the communion of saints those who have gone before and those walking on the earth now.

Today we remember those who have gone before but let us also remember those still on this earth yet touching our lives. We are all bound by the way of love. We remember our loved ones, and the sinners, we remember our challenging encounters and our opportunities for communion. We offer them to God, with whom all is possible.

As the poet W.H. Auden writes: Without arms or charm of culture, Persons of no importance, From an unimportant Province, They did as the Spirit bid, Went forth into a joyless world...to bring joy.

You qualify and your application would be accepted. the condition for saintly employment is your very need for God and God's love, from whom all blessings flow, by whom dust becomes beautiful.

May you the saints of God ordinary and extraordinary, made in the image of God, go forth and spread the joy of the Resurrection! That is our call...to sainthood.

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Today's post sermon meditation is a little more directed than usual. Caught up in the remembrance of our baptism and leading up to All Saints day I was struck by the anthem at convention eucharist last week:

Have you heard God's voice?

In preaching about the common threads of sainthood it is a tightly woven cloth of love, service and humility which flow through us like water through a vessel.

I invite you to reflect on how god is calling you this saints day and how you might respond?

I invite you to remember and seek the saints unknown and unrecognized as well as those gone before.

The Kingdom of God is within

Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?

Are you still prepared to follow?

Have you made a choice to remain and serve,  
though the way be rough and narrow?

Will you use your voice; will you not sit down  
when the multitudes are silent?

Will you make a choice to stand your ground  
when the crowds are turning violent?

Will you walk the path that will cost you much  
and embrace God's love and sorrow?

Will you trust in One who entrusts to you  
the disciples of tomorrow?

Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith  
and believe it could be different?

Will you share your views using words of grace?

Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

In your city streets will you be God's heart?

Will you listen to the voiceless?

Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,  
will you share your faith with the faithless?

We will walk the path that will cost us much  
and embrace God's love and sorrow?

Will you trust in One who entrusts to you  
the disciples of tomorrow.

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