

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

“...there was a great multitude that no one could count,
from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,
standing before the throne and before the Lamb,
robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.”

“Who are these robed in white and where have they come from?”

Today is the feast of All Saints,
the day when we remember those who have gone before us
down the road of Christian Life;
who have preceded us along the Way.

And on this day it is important for us to remember
not only our favorite Saints,
or the popular Saints,
but All the Saints.

It is a time for us to remember what a Saint really is.

I say really because there are a lot of Saints in the world that get missed every day.
Missed even by the church.

What is a Saint?

Webster's dictionary tells us a saint is

“a holy person,
a person who is exceptionally patient, charitable, etc.;
in certain churches,
a person officially recognized as having attained heaven
after an exceptionally holy life and duly venerated.”

OK, I suppose that captures most of it, but I don't like that definition.

I don't like it because it seems too bureaucratic for me.

It also seems to me

that one would have to be dead before they could be a saint,
and I don't think that's really fair.

Everyone talks about your good qualities
and ignores your faults after you're dead.

It's easy to be a dead Saint.

But what about living Saints;
the ones not yet resting from their labors.

What does it take to be a living Saint?

That is after all what we are all supposed to be isn't it?

How are we to live like Saints?

I found a wonderful definition of a Saint, by one of our newer saints
(a new inductee into Lesser Feasts and Fasts)
a Swedish Archbishop by the name of Nathan Söderblum.

Söderblum was an ecumenist, a scholar,
and even earned a Nobel Peace Prize in 1930.

He said, "A saint is one who makes it easier for others to believe in God."

It is a simple definition, but I liked it right away.

It spoke to me.

"One who makes it easier for others to believe in God."

I like it because it has nothing to do with the self
and everything to do with relating to others.

And you can be a saint no matter what you do for a living.

And that means that saints can be anywhere and anytime.

And indeed they are.

I know they are because they have visited me in some of the strangest places
and at some of the strangest hours.

Some of them donate money,
and some of them beg for money.

You never know with a saint.

But you do know one when you meet them.

You know them because the result of that encounter with them
is a strengthening of your own belief in God.

My favorite song about the saints

is the very first one that I learned about saints when I was a boy.

If you are a cradle Episcopalian, I am sure you know it,
and have shared many a joke about it.

“I Sing a Song of the Saints of God”

Yes it is trite and simple,

but I liked it then,

and I still like it now

because it makes the possibility of sainthood
very real to common people like you and me
without in any way diminishing
the great Saints of the past.

It helps us to remember the importance of the little things.

When Jesus starts his public ministry,

as we heard in the Gospel of Matthew this morning,

he starts at the bottom and turns the world upside down --

Blessed are the poor in spirit
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

You know

all those people that are beneath you,
not worthy of your notice, let alone your respect.

The poor in spirit.

We like to think that they all live in boxes under overpasses and in alleys in big cities,
or in Third World countries,

but the truth is they also live here in Jefferson City,
and they even come here to church.

It is vitally important that we remember that,
because it is these poor in spirit that guard the gates to the kingdom of heaven.
It is *they* who hold our immortal salvation in their hands,
in much the same way that *we* hold their mortal salvation in ours.
And you thought it was going to be tough to get around St. Peter!
The poor in Spirit may not have much,
but they have a gift for us that is beyond price.
Their gift to *us* is to *remind us* of all that we *do* have.
And to help us remember that God is the true giver of all.
They are Saints to us. Or they can be if we let them.
And when we respond as we should,
with respect and dignity and generosity,
we are saints to them.
There is, you see, an economy of sainthood.
And it is into this economy that the church works to make saints.
Well, not make Saints exactly.
More like grow them.
It is, after all, God that makes Saints;
the church only nurtures them.
Today we are going to renew our own baptismal vows,
and reaffirm our own identity as saints.
You may wonder that I am calling us saints,
when we aren't officially in any list or book.
In the Episcopal Church we are all considered saints
by virtue of God's grace bestowed in our baptism
So,
if we all start out as saints,
where are all the Saints now?
We're still here... we just don't know it.

As we so often do, we have forgotten.

The opening words from the sermon on the mount that we heard today
are a reminder that the little people,
the poor in spirit,
the mourners,
and the meek,
are not little before God.

And it is we who hunger and thirst after righteousness,
who call ourselves the merciful and the peacemakers;
it is we who will bring in the kingdom of God.

Or not.

Right now we are all that God has.

And if we don't do it now, it won't get done until God finds someone else who will
listen.

It's not a big job, really.

But it is a lot of little ones.

The life of a saint is made manifest in a lifetime of small kindnesses.

Today is a day to remember "the great multitude that no one could count,
from every nation,
from all tribes and peoples and languages,
standing before the throne and before the Lamb,
robed in white, with palm branches in their hands."

But it is also a day to remember the little saints,
and to remember that we too are Saints.

And to ask ourselves if that is how we have been behaving.

Are we living like Saints?

Are we regularly doing things in our lives

that make it easier for others to believe in God?

If not, well... there's no time like the present to start. Amen.