

All Saints 2018

Every tear is wiped away

In the Christian tradition, we have been given the example of many who followed Jesus. We celebrate All Saints Day today and remember those living and departed who have given their life to following in Christ's way of love.

In the Episcopal Church, we believe the Communion of Saints is every one of us. We are all saints—called to follow in the way Christ sets before us. Christ calls and the saint responds. Our deepest “yes” to God requires change and sacrifice but it is the path to fulness of life, to fulness of love for God and neighbor.

Among the saints there are stories of many who dropped everything and followed Christ. Jesus called his first apostles saying, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people”¹. They drop their fish nets catching fish and what they were doing to follow this Son of Man. St Francis, in the 12th century, was a son of a wealthy Italian textile merchant who, upon hearing a call to rebuild the church, appeared in front of his bishop in the public square and gave everything he had—even the clothes he was wearing—as a sign of giving all to this call of reform. His dear friend, Clare, heard a call and she, too, gave up all she had; cut her hair and lived her life serving the poor and the lepers in Assisi.

A favorite Saint of mine is Benedict who lived in the 5th century. When he was around thirteen [the age of those who are going through their Rite 13 ceremony today] he went to a cave and stayed there in solitude and silence for three years. [Thankfully, that's not everyone's path. We don't need to worry about that.] After he emerged, he wrote a rule on how to live together in community...a manual for living with others. He talks about the proper amounts of food to consume, when to pray, how to sleep, etc.; but the goal of it is for brothers and sisters to live together harmoniously in the presence of God. He explains that the highest form of community is one in which we do not just run away when things get upsetting or difficult. Rather it is about a commitment to serve those you are with, those you live up close with despite what you think of them or, even, if you like them. Above all you care for them. They are part of you as much as you are part of the community.

While some of his rules are specific to life in a shared monastic house, there are deep truths from this communal life that apply to all of us. We all live in community.

There are times when this is wonderful, the source of our greatest joy-- filled by loving others and being loved. But there are times when this is difficult and so, sadly, there can be times when this is terrifying. We can see our community as our family, our friends, our neighborhood; but for better or for worse our community today has opened up widely—on a global scale. Those we know and are connected to, even if only virtually, are part of our human family. And, as members of this national and global community, we cannot avoid the terrible occurrences in the last two weeks and the building up to them. Shootings and hate crimes in Pittsburg, Kentucky and Tallahassee targeting African Americans and Jews— we live in a

¹ Matthew 4:19, Mark 1:17

country living in a lie that some are less than human—whether that be dependent on race, religion, class, education, or political party. We cannot avoid this.

We can try. We can sure try to avoid this. It is comfortable to try and define ourselves as separate from others—they are there, we are here. I have my protections. I can take care of myself. We can pretend to be untouched by the sorrow, the pain, the anger of others; but to do this denies part of the community given to us by God.

As followers of Christ we believe that in every human being there is Christ dwelling in them—in all people—created by God. In God's community we do not leave, we do not turn away when things are uncomfortable.

Instead we must strive even more for God's way of deep and great love, mercy, justice, peace and truth. And the only way we can do this is together.

Our passage from Revelation today talks about the New Jerusalem. This is not an empty field, it is not a single-family household. Rather it is *a city* in which God will wipe away every tear from all tribes, nations and peoples. These tears don't just disappear. They are wiped away. As Christians looking for a new heaven and a new earth we do not wait idly—we follow the way of Christ. We care for and love our brothers and sisters as citizens of this City and we are called to wipe away tears. Tears that will not come back.

Jesus' greatest commandment to love God and love neighbor is not a sentiment. It is not about being nice or being likeable. That can come from a place that protects and preserves "me", but does not help to build up others...not build up "us". And love, the greatest fulfillment of our Christian life and any life, is about "us"... our community. This is a faith we journey on together. We cannot bear all the pain of this world as an individual, we cannot wipe away every tear by ourselves; but together, with God, we believe this reality where every tear wiped away is possible.

It is a lie that what I do doesn't affect you. It is a lie that what you do does not affect me. It is a lie that has been told for a long time, but one we don't subscribe to here. What we do does affect others. We are a community which is bound by the belief and the reality that we, at our deepest and truest, are God's and thus belong to one another. Part of living with others is that at times we lay aside our own agendas, what may be best for me as an individual is to love those who carry too much.

We follow One who acknowledges brokenness and sin and works with love to heal. When I share my pain, when we share in others sufferings—it is not about a burden—it is something we as citizens in a community have to acknowledge and deal with. As with any family, we cannot always wait for something else or someone else to change. At times it is us... me who has to change. One of the hardest pieces of living together is to recognize it is actually me, you, that needs to be Christ to another [be that a classmate, colleague, someone with a different skin color or religion]. It's actually me, or you, that needs to examine how we are complicit and recognize our call to put aside our own agendas and programs to, as Jesus so beautifully puts it, lay down our lives for our friends. We do not choose those friends—Christ gives them to us. We are part of a community that needs us all to act and love and this is our

call to change, to sacrifice, to say yes to how God calls us to love more deeply than we ever knew possible.

As we seek to love the Christ in all others, we must also acknowledge the Christ in us. We are a church whose doors are open to Christ in ALL people. When we reject that, we reject a part of Christ in ourselves.

To follow Christ is not easy. It is not a safety net. Rather it is a net that holds us together. Like the apostles, we are called to transform the net we carry into that which fishes for people, that which seeks to bring all people into the loving fold of God. It is said that St Francis upon giving up all he had—had nothing but he gained everything. We are not St Francis, we are not Clare or Benedict... but we are called to be saints. We do not do this alone, but in a community of others we depend on and who depend on us whether we realize it or not.

We remember those who have died, those who mourn, and those in pain. We remember them with our action and we pray for the courage and strength to be who God calls us to be in this community we are called to love.

Amen.

