

Saint Thomas Church
Twentieth Sunday After Trinity
(All Saints)
November 3, 2019
rmcneely+

If you are a little confused with today's service you are to be commended.

It is not some time warp caused by the conversion from Daylight Saving Time to Pacific Standard Time or the fact that the 49ers are undefeated and the Warriors have a losing record.

We are still in the green season of Trinity but the altar and clergy are vested in white.

The music is all about saints, but the gospel, epistle and collect are the ones for the 20th Sunday After Trinity and have nothing to do with Saints

Even the bulletin says this is the 20th Sunday After Trinity. So what happened to Trinity? And why are we singing about saints?

If you are confused, you are paying attention.

Here's the deal:

All Saints Day was Friday and in a Saint Thomas' first

we celebrated it here in an evening service
attended by more people than I had expected.

It was glorious.

The stalwart and brave souls sang 4 hymns without the help of choir or organ. Some of them have returned today to find out what the hymns actually sound like.

The Feast of All Saints is of such importance that it has an octave, the 7 days following All Saints Day in which to prayerfully consider all that the Saints bring us.

Today is the Sunday within the Octave and at the discretion of the clergy, we can suspend Trinity briefly and contemplate all that is involved in the All Saints celebration.

First, a little background:

It was Pope Gregory IV who established All Saints Day in the 4th century.

He observed that in earlier centuries

Countless men and women

Had been persecuted,

Literally hunted and tortured for their faith in Jesus

Sometimes to the delight of the crowds.

He concluded that we should remember them

To recall the sacrifices of the nameless thousands

And All Saints Day was originally set aside to commemorate them

Their sacrifice and what it means to us in our lives.

So, what is a Saint?

Seems like a silly question

Saints are those men and women from ancient times

Who lived perfect saintly lives

And who believed in Jesus, the Christ

Some of whom were martyred for their beliefs

Who were associated with miracles

And recognized by the Church.

Well . . . sort of. This is the key:

A Saint is anyone who separates themselves from the world

For a time

And who dedicate themselves to God

To do His will.

The English word ‘saint’ comes to us from the Latin “sanctus”

Meaning: to set apart and devote to the exclusive purpose of God.

It forms the basis of our words: Saint, sacred, sanctify and sanctuary.

So this is the sanctuary,

A place we physically set apart

From the rest of the church building

And devote it exclusively to the worship of God

That's why the altar is here,

Why the credence table with the elements for communion is here.

That's why we receive communion here.

Nothing happens in this space that does not involve God
Of all the real estate in San Francisco
We have set this space apart and dedicated it to God.

Certainly the Roman Church has for centuries vetted and scrutinized the lives of men and women and declared them Saints. The Anglican Church has substantially adopted them too. We know many of them, the Apostles, Mary and Joseph

People who dedicated their lives to God.

Let's consider for a moment the Saint for whom our City was named:
Saint Francis of Assisi.

Francis lived in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Italy.
He was the son of a wealth cloth merchant
and enjoyed all the benefits of the life that his father provided.
Lacking nothing.

As he grew into youngmanhood
It became apparent that Francis was different
He had an abiding concern for people who had nothing
Who were hungry, cold and without enough clothing.

He wanted to do all he could for them.
He literally gave away the clothes on his back to those in need.

His father was furious when he learned that Francis had given away the money what was paid for a shipment of cloth that he gave Francis to sell in the market place for his company.

Ultimately Francis renounced his inheritance even the clothes on his back and left his comfortable home and family in order to serve those in need.

He ate the food he begged
Wore the clothes given to him
Lived where people would let him in.

It was the beginning of a new life for him.

A life in the church.

There was a dilapidated and abandoned little stone chapel near Assisi Italy

It was one of the places that Francis took shelter.

One evening Francis was awakened by a voice
A voice from God who said
“Francis, rebuild my church.”

Francis took the words literally

And the townspeople complained about this young man who was knocking on doors begging rocks.

It took him a long time but Francis rebuilt the little church, San Damiano, which still stands today.

Francis became known for his love of God's creation
He would spend days in the forest

And could be found talking and singing to the plants the trees and the animals whom he knew as his brothers and sisters.

It is no wonder that the religious of the ecology movement in the 60's thought of Francis as their patron saint.

It is common to see statues of Francis with birds perched on his shoulder and arms.

Toward the end of his short life (Francis lived to be only 45 years old)

Francis asked the only thing ever asked of God:

To know the love and passion of our Lord at the crucifixion.

Francis was atop Mt La Verna

He awoke bearing the crucifixion wounds of Our Lord

In his hands, his feet and his side.

The Stigmata,

Francis concealed them but they bled and soon his secret was out.

His brother monks cared for him until his death not many months later.

The Stigmata is always fatal.

Francis was made a saint in 1228, two years after his death.

Francis' story is just one of hundreds.

They are fascinating stores

There are kings

There are paupers

There are priests and soldiers

Some of the most unlikely people.

But their lives and the ways they led them remain instructive to our lives.

They were lights of the world in their several generations

They were the choice vessels of God's grace

Because they sought to do their duty

In that state of life unto which god had been pleased to call them.

So Saint's are people like Francis.

But the Anglican concept of saint is broader than you might think.

It also includes the people Gregory IV was thinking about

The nameless who gave their lives for their faith in Our Lord.

They too, separated themselves from the world

And dedicated themselves to God and doing His will in their lives.

So in this time of All Saints we remember them too

And all who have gone before us.

All who rest in peace in heaven.

They include the people we have known who have died

Family members, loved ones, friends.

In older days this would be a time when we would visit their graves

And decorate them with flowers, poems, writings, mementos

They are saints too.

Today and at this service is the day we remember them

Offer thanksgiving

For their lives

Their work

Their examples.

You have noticed that during the prayer for the whole state of Christ's Church there is a pause.

A period of silence as we individually pray for the faithful departed.

This morning, that pause will be a little longer

Use it to remember the saints in your life.

But the Anglican concept of Saints is broader still.

Who do you know who has separated themselves from the world

And dedicated themselves to God

Today

Right here

And right now.

They are sitting right next to you.

This morning, all of you have left the world and entered those doors into the House of God.

And for this hour,

Dedicated yourselves to God

In thanksgiving and in prayer and in devotion

You have followed God's will in your life

And are here in this little miracle church of God's love.

You too are a saint.

And we celebrate all of you at this time too in the time of All Saints.

But we are still not done.

The concept is broader still.

Remember the Apostles Creed

The one we say in Morning and Evening Prayer?

We say in the Apostles Creed that we believe in the Communion of Saints.

Let me take you back to your confirmation class.

Communion of Saints:

Whenever there is a communion service and we receive the body and blood of Christ

We are spiritually joined with and receive communion with all the saints too.

The concept of time is eroded

The past and the present intersect

And become one

In communion, that close union with God and with each other.

There is a host, a cloud of saints,

People from across time

People from across geography

People who are living

People who live eternally with God.

We are all mysteriously joined together as we receive communion

In the love of God that takes place here in the sanctuary of this church

This organic body of Christ.

And we are changed.

We live in a time that is far different from the violent Christian

Persecutions of the past. But it is a time that is no less threatening to the church.

It is a time when all of us

The Saints of God

Are called to prayer and more.

So what will good folks do?

We are already doing it . . . right now. We set apart a portion of our lives this morning and came to church and dedicated the time to do God's will.

We are part of the organic body of Christ, his church by virtue of our Baptism

We come to participate in the Communion of Saints each Sunday and throughout the Church year.

We take

And make communion with Him

In this service

This close union with God.

We can come to Bible Group, or read His word and let it affect our lives.

Several of you say the Daily Offices: Morning and Evening Prayer

We say our prayers each day, at each meal and before retiring each night.

And when we take stock of our lives;

Especially in these days of All Saints

And consider the lives of the Saints

Those who have been formally sainted

And those who have not

We may hear God's will

And may we have the courage to set apart a portion of our lives

And perhaps a greater portion of our lives to do that will.

There is a favorite song in our Hymnal written by a vicar's wife for their children in the 1920's. She never intended it, but the song became a world wide hit translated into many languages. She titled it "Sing a

Song of the Saints of God". Some of you might remember it. It has a sweet message but one that will do us good as well.

So if I may borrow from the Children:

For the Saints of God are folk just like you

And there's not any reason

No, not the least

Why you shouldn't be one too.