

The Sunday after All Saints Day
Ephesians 1: 15-23, Psalm 149, Luke 6:20-31
November 6, 2016
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When we think of saints, we usually think of people like Mother Teresa, who was officially canonized by the Catholic Church this past September. She will always be considered one of the great ones for sure. Saint Teresa of Calcutta now has a special feast day which is September 5. Other great saints have their own day of recognition as well. We have a calendar with special saint days in the front of our Prayer Book, when you get a chance to look sometime.

November 1 and the Sunday that follows are both specific times to remember those godly folks who will never get the fame and recognition of a Teresa of Calcutta or a Francis of Assisi, but nevertheless have tried to follow Christ "in all virtuous and godly living..." as we prayed in the collect earlier. They are the blue-collar saints, if you will, the common, run-of-the-mill Christians like you and me.

I like to say that we receive the title of "saint" at our baptism and then have the rest of our lives to live into and up to such an exalted designation. Paul's letter to the Ephesians implies that all the members of the young church in Ephesus are saints by virtue of their faith in Jesus and their love for one another.

This morning Jesus sets the mark very, very high with his beatitudes and woes and the statements that follow about loving enemies and incredibly generous giving. If these are the benchmarks for sainthood, then most of us still have a long way to go, with God's help.

The stark differences between the four blessed statements and the four woes are consistent with Jesus' parables and his assertion that the first will be last and the last will be first. I don't think Jesus wants us to be poor, hungry, sorrowful and persecuted all the time, but he doesn't want us to devote our lives solely to accumulating wealth for the purpose of never having to experience want, hunger, sadness or persecution. And he certainly doesn't want us to be prejudiced against the actual poor.

Today's gospel is Jesus' appeal for his followers to have open hearts and open hands toward everyone and especially the poor, if we want to know the ineffable joys available and reserved for the saints. The danger of having much is that we may overlook or minimize our need for God and other people altogether.

For the last several years I have asked you to think about someone you know who has exemplified Christ's life, someone who tries to live today's gospel, someone you consider to be a saint. This can be someone living or deceased.

Maybe this quote by Nathan Soderblom will further help you identify that person this year:
“Saints are persons who make it easier for others to believe in God.”

If you like, you can come forward in a moment and light a votive candle for that person because he or she is or has been a glowing flame in your life.

This year I am going to light a candle for Saint Claire of McKenney, who is nearly always wonderfully kind, extravagantly generous, incredibly thoughtful and compassionate toward everyone. She helps me believe in God because she models Jesus’ teachings as well as anyone I know.