

All Saints Day

a sermon preached on the

Feast of All Saints

1 November 2009

at

St Luke's in the City, Christchurch

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Lection: John 11: 32-44

The Feast of All Saints remembers not only the “official saints”, that is, those officially pronounced as saints by the church authority, but also includes the legions of anonymous saints living among us today, whose acts of compassion and love for others are often carried out with sacrifice, and quiet humility as Christians striving to follow the examples shown to us by the life of Christ.

Nowhere is this love and compassion better demonstrated than in today's gospel, where Jesus openly wept with his friends Mary and Martha, and shared in their grief at the death of their brother Lazarus. Then Jesus demonstrated (to the crowd standing by) the glory and power of God, by calling Lazarus back to life.

God is great; and God's greatness, is basically a greatness of love and grace.

There are also great people in every walk of life who have been shining examples of God's passion, grace and goodness.

The saints (those who have gone before us) have laid out paths for us. They have travelled the way ahead of us. They have shown us what ordinary human beings like ourselves can achieve when we avail ourselves of the grace of God. They have set us an example of determination, dedication and sacrifice. All around us today there are men and women who reach out to us and guide us. People for whom the two great commandments, Love of God and Love of neighbour have been united.

Love is probably the most misinterpreted word in our culture; but the love Jesus talks about is about self-giving, to love another person is to value and know that person. This love expresses itself in acts of kindness and service. It is a love not only for family and friends - it is also extended to the stranger and even to the enemy (a tough call indeed).

Mother Teresa was frequently asked if she was a saint. Her typical response was : Quote: “Oh no! Every person was created to be a saint. God manifests his greatness by using our nothingness. I am happy you see Jesus in me, because I see Him in you”. Unquote.

It is very easy to get devotion to the saints wrong. Some people think all they have to do is get a rub of a relic for the holiness of the saint to be transferred to them. It is not that easy. The saints serve as models for us in our following of Christ. They do not provide us with shortcuts, and ways of evading the personal sacrifices. We must not expect them to do for us what we could do for ourselves.

There is a story about a man called Peter, who prided himself on having a great devotion to St Francis of Assisi. Peter was very friendly with a couple who had an adult crippled son. One evening they arranged to go for dinner at a local restaurant. The son was feeling a little off colour, and did not feel up to going out. He told the others to go ahead with their arrangements, and that he was quite happy to stay home and read. Part way through the meal, Peter began to feel uneasy at the thought of the crippled man sitting alone at home. What if a fire broke out? or he had fallen and was unable to get up. He thought of St Francis, and reflected; what's the use of studying the life of a saint and following his footsteps in far-off Assisi, if I leave a crippled man at home, when I have it in my power to help him. He got up from the table, and went back to be with the couple's son.

This is an example of what the saints are supposed to mean to us. They challenge us, and question our sincerity. They inspire us to find our kinder, compassionate loving selves.

Whatever our path in life, what really matters is, that we should be ourselves, our unique selves; the kind of person God created in us, and intended us to be. We must not try to be someone else.

The focus is not us. It is all about God, and what God wishes to do through us.

Amen.

Reference: F. McCarthy
C. Ringma

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