

01 November 2020, All Saints' Day:

Happy and Blessed All Saints' Day. Here are three brief vignettes.

Years ago, I saw written on a blackboard in a Christian Education building the first line of the well-loved hymn, "For all the saints, who from their labor rest." However, the writer mis-wrote the line: "For all *MY* saints, who from their labor rest." Here the word "my", is not in the sense of 'my shoes', something I possess but discard when no longer useful. The "my" is as in, my family: a gift not chosen, but ours nonetheless, to be experienced with the joy and challenge which the gift brings. We gather each Sunday in this place called "Calvary." Each of us can rightly say, "This is my parish," but not in the sense of possession but of a gift infinitely larger than ourselves.

The doctrine of the Communion of Saints is quite neglected now days. If we think of the Saints at all, it is like thinking about the Equator, or the Securities and Exchange Commission. It's something the 'experts' say is there—sounds impressive—but not anything personal. Someone wrote that to be without a history is to be without identity. We learn our identity by learning our past, not only Calvary's past but our Christian past, through the lives and experiences of those who have gone before.

The 2nd vignette: In the 12th Century, St Bernard wrote concerning All Saints Day: "Why should...the celebration of this feast...mean anything to the saints? ...the saints have no need of honor from us; neither does our devotion add the slightest thing to what is theirs. Clearly, if we venerate their memory, it serves us, not them."

The veneration of saints began early in the Church's life. In remembering the saints, we learn that living our faith is possible, because we see that others have. We learn how God acted mightily in and through them. We also see their failures, yet their refusal to give up on the God who never gave up on them. In our culture, mistakes are explained, rationalized, or ignored. In the Church we are to look unflinchingly at the sins of our forebears, knowing we are no more perfect than they, knowing the Church always needs reform, repentance, and renewal. In the Communion of Saints, we find encouragement to offer ourselves ever more deeply to Christ, living now according to the pattern of God's mercy and grace bestowed in all ages, to all the faithful.

The 3rd vignette: If I were to say the first 20 names entered in our parish register 156 years ago, most would not be familiar. And, our names would be unrecognizable, if today's parish register were transported back to 1864. We can be near-sighted, for the past and the future. Those first members could not possibly have imagined or anticipated that your name would be joined with their names, could not possibly have known that this beautiful Church would be built as a place of prayer, worship, and service. They surely hoped their precarious beginning would bear fruit, but no certainty. God called them together, not just for themselves. We are not here just for ourselves either; we offer ourselves—to worship, pray, labor, share, learn to live the Gospel—for all whom God will yet call to Calvary.

Today Baptism and the Saints come together. We do not, cannot know who Albright will be. We trust God, committing her to our gracious Lord, that God's wisdom and power will be known in and through her.

Five Thousand years from now, our distant progeny will look back on us as 'early Christians'. The 21st Century, to them, will be more remote than the 1st Century is to us. To be in the Communion of Saints is to live this truth: our faith is built on the faith and sacrifice of others, Jesus Christ being the cornerstone; and we are being built up as living members of a holy temple, so others also come to know and follow Jesus.

Today begins our Stewardship ministry for 2021. We are to commit ourselves prayerfully, thoughtfully, realistically to God's ministry and mission at Calvary. We give thanks for all in whom has been manifested God's mighty acts throughout the centuries. We pray that as we learn more of their witness, we will be strengthened and encouraged to follow where they have led the way. And we re-dedicate our lives as an offering for others, that a multitude whom we will never know in our earthly life will be built up in faith, as God accomplishes in us mighty acts for their salvation. For all that God has done, is doing, and will yet accomplish in and through us, in and through the glorious Communion of Saints: Thanks be to God. Amen.