

All Saints' Sunday, Year C, 110313
All Saints Episcopal Church

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer and Giver of life. Amen.

Happy Feast Day!

Today is our celebration of All Saints' Day, our parish feast day, when we honor all who have died. It is a celebration that claims the promise that even in death, life is changed, not ended. It is also a feast day in which we honor our current saints - those who are living among us - the company of saints - the congregation of God's people gathered in a particular place at a particular time.

Who is a saint? The first two definitions of the word in dictionary.com say, "1. Any of certain persons of exceptional holiness of life, formally recognized as such by the Christian Church, especially by canonization and 2. A person of great holiness, virtue, or benevolence."

The official saints are people who have died, but there are saints who are living in our midst as well. And while we often refer to 'Capital S' saints - you know, the ones who are famous (St. Mary, St. Francis, St. Paul, St. Joan of Arc, etc.) - there are also 'Little S' saints - ordinary people like doctors, queens, shepherdesses on the green that you can meet in church or trains or shops or at tea. The truth is that all of the saints, famous or not, are human beings, which means that they are imperfect persons, flawed, sinners. We are, all of us, saints of God, not by virtue of being superheroes, but by virtue of having been created by God as part of God's family. God's love for all of us connects us, living and dead, in one communion, one fellowship.

All Saints' Day celebrates those whose good examples remind us of what we can be at our best. The stories of their lives remind us of who we are, what we believe, and what we can become. They remind us how closely a human being can follow the example of Jesus. They draw us forward, give us courage, strengthen us to do God's will, and lead the way. Their good examples remind us that God reaches out to us with grace and love and care.

Michael Malone is a Southern writer of mystery novels, which almost always include bits of real wisdom about religious life. A few years ago, his thriller entitled *First Lady* featured some stars - rock stars, political stars, social stars, and a minor

character who was an Episcopal priest. At one point, the priest reflects on what makes a saint:

"What makes a saint? If stars are the light, then I'd say saints are people the light shines through. Not just the famous saints, because the famous ones are stars, too. But the everyday saints around us in the world. Light shines through them and illuminates what they see. The light just goes right through them to what they love so that we can see its beauty. They don't get in the way because they're looking too." (Michael Malone, First Lady, page 426).

Saints are the people the light shines through. Blessed are the saints.

Blessed are you who are poor, said Jesus. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are you who hunger and thirst, who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are you who weep. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek, the peacemakers.

The Church uses all those words in the gospel for All Saints Sunday, the day when we remember the saints. As Michael Malone points out, those saints are not just the stars, not just those whose works outshone the rest. Those saints are the everyday folks, the folks whom the light shines through. "The light goes right through them to what they love so that we can see its beauty."

The saints among us today are the poor, those who mourn, those who hunger and thirst, the meek, the peacemakers. Yes, there are some superstar saints in the world today. But most of us are not superstar saints. We are those who mourn and weep, who are hungry and thirsty for things.

The incredible truth of All Saints Day is that every one of us baptized persons is a saint in the eyes of God. We do not have to pass some sanctification test to be a saint in the eyes of God. God sanctifies us when we are baptized. God chooses us, God claims us, to be vessels through whom the light shines.

The saints don't get in the way, because they, too, are looking at what the light is shining on.

I am discovering at least one very happy circumstance to growing old. The older I become, the more saints I get to know. And you know what? Most of us saints

really are strange. I've been in some great communities where the saints have not all looked the same. They have not all acted the same. They did not even all believe in exactly the same way.

But they knew how to give. They knew how to serve. The saints I have known, whether poor or rich, weeping or laughing, hungry or full, have somehow pointed me to God in whatever they have been experiencing. They have looked to God, and the light shone right through them. "The light just goes right through them to what they love so that we can see its beauty. They don't get in the way, because they're looking, too."

What the saints are looking at is the love of God. Do you see it? Do you see that love through the magnificent communion of saints? Do you see that love through one another?

I hope so. The saints are those, in every generation, who show us God's love affair with humanity. Older churches, like this All Saints, seem to have an advantage over newer ones: we have known a lot of saints. We have weathered more storms. We have seen the crazy folks, the fringe groups, come and go. We have experienced tragedy. We have experienced joy. We know, from experience, that we will live through it. We have known a lot of saints, and those saints were not all the same sort of person. (Maybe at lunch today, you'll have time to reminisce about some of the saints you have known here or elsewhere.)

This is why the Church celebrates All Saints Day. We've known a lot more saints than just the famous ones. We have known the non-descript, the bumbling, and the inept ones. The justly proud and the overly humble. The wonderfully capable and the woefully decrepit. We've known the poor in spirit, those who are empty enough to show us God. At some point, each of them has provided a space for us to know God. Let us give thanks for all the saints, known and unknown! Amen.