



All Saints' Day
Rev. Jonathan Stepp
Sunday, November 1, 2020

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Three friends who hadn't seen each other in quite a while got together at the pub for a beer. The first guy said, "hey, since I've last seen you all, I've had a son. He was born on St. George's day so we named him George."

"That's amazing," his friend replied, "I also had a son, he was born on St. Mark's day and we named him Mark."

Finally the third guy said, "I really can't believe this coincidence, the same thing happened to my son Pancake!"

My kids assured me that this joke works even if you don't know that Shrove Tuesday is sometimes called Pancake Day – in fact, they said they assumed the kid was born on some kind of National Pancake Day.

Our relationship with the saints is interesting and worth thinking about since today is the Feast Day of All Saints. There is, of course, the tradition of naming your child after a Saint on whose day he happens to be born. And sometimes we name kids after saints that aren't even officially saints – we named Lewis after the writer and theologian C.S. Lewis, for example.

There's also the tradition of looking to the saints for inspiration in our own lives. Some, like St. Patrick, have very inspiring stories that are obscured by cultural traditions that have grown up around them over the years. Some, like St. Francis of Assisi, are probably more venerated in spirit than in practice – few of us have been willing to adopt his life utter poverty and simplicity.

What all the saints have in common is the legacy of faith they left to the generations who came after them. The question we might ask, as we reflect on their lives this All Saints' Day, is what legacy will we leave to the generations that come after us?

We each, in our own way, are saints, even if our lives don't seem as grandiose or historically significant as their lives did. Each of us, in our own way, can leave a legacy to our families, friends, neighbors, and fellow Christians. How would we do that?

First, we need to remember that being a saint is not easy. Almost all the saints – from Patrick to Francis to more modern examples, like Martin Luther King, Jr., were not especially popular or well-liked during their own lives. Usually the saints stood against the prevailing opinions of their day, defended those that others looked down upon, and resisted sinful systems of oppression, violence, and racism. To be a saint means to take the long view – being a saint means realizing the truth of something that Martin Luther King, Jr., said: the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. Helping social justice to come into being was a huge challenge in 400 A.D. for St. Patrick, in 1200 A.D. for St. Francis, and it is a challenge for us in the 21st century.

Let me offer two examples.

This Tuesday will be one of the most important election days of our lives. I'm guessing that most of us have already early voted – but you haven't voted yet then you need to get to the polls on Tuesday and do your part. There's no way for us to know for sure how things will turn out on Tuesday. By Wednesday, or Saturday, or two weeks from now, or whenever the final results of the voting are known, you may be elated or you may be despondent. You don't know if your efforts and your vote will achieve the outcome you are looking for.

But, as a saint, you can know this: however long the arc of the moral universe may be, it will in the end bend towards justice. Saints don't allow just one debate, or one election, or the outcome of specific events to dissuade them from what they know to be true and important. Saints know that God is on the side of justice, God is on the side of those who are marginalized and oppressed, and God will be faithful to bring justice to pass. Our job is to be faithful to pursuing God's vision of love and justice regardless of how events may turn out in the moment.

The legacy you leave by voting is not necessarily the legacy of voting for the winner every time. Your saintly legacy by voting is that you had the courage to stand on the right side of history and cast your vote in favor of justice. As with the saints of old, you may not always be counted among the winners in the here and now, but as with all the saints who have gone before us, you will be counted as one who stood for what was right and helped to bend the arc of humanity's existence towards justice and love.

My second example is closer to home. This parish, All Saints Franklin, is also our legacy. Each one of us is helping to build a place of holiness here which can be passed on to generations to come. We do it by joining in prayer in this place, by volunteering our giftedness to serve, and by giving of our financial resources. I am immensely proud to be the rector of such a church as this. A church where everyone pitches in to help, each in their own way. A church where people gather to pray together and encourage each other. A church where everyone who could keep giving financially throughout this very difficult year has done so. In one of the most challenging years of the last century, we have kept our church alive and thriving.

This week you'll be receiving your 2021 pledge cards in the mail. Pledging is rather mundane in the grand scheme of all the things that saints might do, but it is one of those mundane things that is vitally important. Like brushing your teeth or loading the dish washer. We each need to pledge so that we, together as a community, can have the resources we need to fulfill the calling God has given us.

The past two years I have asked you, if possible, to increase your pledge – to give 10% more than what you gave the previous year. And I have been amazed by your generosity. Our pledges have increased by quite a bit.

This year I am simply asking you, if you can, to pledge for 2021 at least what you pledged for 2020. If you can give a little more next year, God bless you and thank you. But I understand how unsettling and difficult these times are for all of us and I know that in some cases some of us will be fortunate if we can do next year what we did this year.

Regardless of what you decide to pledge, please know this: your gift is a gift to God and God loves and appreciates everything and anything you freely and joyfully give to him by giving to the church. You are loved by your Father, through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit because the Triune God finds you loveable and likeable. And like any good Father who loves his children, God loves every gift given joyfully – no matter how large or how small.

So, please talk with your family when you receive your card, pray about it, fill it out, and either bring it to services on one of the next two Sundays or mail it back to the church office.

It is the legacy we leave that makes us saints. A legacy of love for others, a legacy of working for justice, and a legacy of giving faithfully to support this place of holiness. May the Holy Spirit of Christ give us all the faith and courage to live faithfully and leave a saintly legacy for the generations who will come after us. Amen