

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

We usually hear about this day on the actual feast day itself, November 1. And it is usually in the shadow of references to the evening before, Halloween on October 31. Noticing the difference as the little goblins and monsters and spooks, saying “trick or treat” at our doors, have now gone. Disappearing into the night because, at midnight on entering November 1, the mists clear for the entrance of the great saints of God as recognized in the millennia-long efforts of the wider, historic church to accentuate the distinction between those two days.

Why do that? Well, the historical, institutional church identified holy persons as saints. On November 1<sup>st</sup>, and celebrated on this Sunday, the word “saint” came to be applied by the church primarily for persona of heroic sanctity. The “super” holy. Those whose deeds were recalled with gratitude by later generations.

Then, beginning in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the church recognized a second day of celebration, held on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, which set aside another day as an extension of All Saints’...which the church remembered the vast body of the faithful. People who, although were as redeemed as the first group, were and are unknown in the wider fellowship of the church.

That was then. This is now.

I want to make clear that this, to me, is serious business. Serious to the extent of emphasis upon the full expansiveness of the joyous celebration of today, and what it really means...at least, to me. In the vast expanse of the recorded time of our ancient to contemporary faith, today is...and should be...one of the great, major feast days of the church.

We, as the greater, global church, are reverting back to the understanding of the earliest Christian theological foundations of the first and second centuries. We may be moving at a glacially slow pace, but we are moving...in our understanding of who we are, in the sight of God, and as people of God. All of us.

The truth is that the greatest heroes of the church were no different...NONE...than the person you looked at in the mirror this morning. We have heard these examples before.

The truth is that St. John the Evangelist...the apostle of Jesus...was really a hard-working grunt of a guy who likely smelled of fish guts throughout his ministry.

The truth is that St. John the Baptist...the foreteller of the coming of Jesus...was a kind of freak who we know wore little more than burlap, and ate little more than bugs.

The truth is that St. Mary of Magdale...who we know as Mary Magdalene...was a Jewish girl living in the culture and manner of a Gentile, in addition to having a reputation as a notorious sinner.

The truth is that Jesus himself, as a toddler, probably threw tantrums and told his mother “NO!” as a two-year old. He probably wet the bed, fought with his siblings, had his backside warmed by his mother...after all, scripture tells us that he was human in every way.

The truth is that the New Testament itself makes no distinctions between persons as to level of holiness.

The truth is that the New Testament calls **all**...I repeat, **all... all** baptized Christians “saints”.

All the baptized are saints of God. You. Me. All of us. Why?

Because we each are unconditionally and eternally loved by God. To me, the word “saint” does not indicate a position of status, like a rank, but rather is a proper noun indicating a depth of emotional relationship. A tender endearment of the heart. When I have the extraordinary privilege and blessing at the baptismal sacrament for a baby or toddler, and introducing him or her to the parish as the newest saint of God, it is my emotional expression, containing in one word, the continuation of our prayer to God for this very young but common life, at this most uncommon time in life. The time of being set apart by nature of beginning a close relationship with God.

So today, like Jesus...we will instead remember all of the others who have lived among us. Those souls we remember in our presence. Those whose lives touched us, and live within us still. Those whose names we have shared in loving remembrance. Those whose names are inscribed on our hearts, and also in many instances upon wood, brass, bronze, glass...on the walls and windows and the items within this holy place itself.

They are the same as you and me. They also had their bumps and bruises... made messes, threw tantrums, and wet the bed...but, on the whole, lived lives of integrity. Of hope. Of sacrifice. Of commitment. Of love.

Today we give thanks to God...in part by opening our understanding of sainthood back to the first centuries of the church, and in helping us know...by our dearest loved ones whose names we will list...that they, and we, are made holy in the sight of God by virtue of our baptism into the very Body of Christ, through the grace of the loving God revealed to us as the Father, and as the Son, and as the Holy Spirit.

Amen.