

All Saints Weekend (B/RCL)
November 3-4, 2018
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

It's All Saints Weekend. I'm here to say: **you're** the saints. You're not the **only** saints, but you're some of them! I was reminded of that as I served you Holy Communion last week. The Sacrament is holy and so are the communicants. You extended your hands to receive the Gift – and I saw hands that have:

- tenderly held infants, the living answers to their parents' prayers;
- hands that have faithfully cared for sick spouses and elderly parents;
- the healing hands of physicians and nurses;
- the sometimes battered hands of those who lug furniture;
- the grubby hands of young ones who've been playing outside
- the nurturing hands of those who teach
- the strong, saving hands of firefighters, police, EMT's, detectives

Hands don't reveal everything, of course. When you shake the hand of the person next to you during the sharing of peace or hold that person's hand when we pray the Lord's Prayer, you can't automatically tell who are the ones who attend even the funerals of those they've never met, to surround the family with this faith community's love and care. You can't tell by looking at their hands who cooks dinner every time Family Promise guests come to town, so deliciously and beautifully that one temporarily homeless mom stood and stared, then took a photo of the serving table and said, "I'm going to keep this picture forever." You can't tell by looking who teaches our Sunday School children or who stays after worship on Saturday nights to mentor our confirmands,

or who comes out on Thursday night to practice the songs we're blessed to hear on Sunday. It's not enough to have a few big names saints whom churches are named after or whose names occasionally appear in our Celebrate insert. God needs millions of everyday saints whose circle of influence may be geographically small but is still spiritually deep.

In this last year we said goodbye to a number of friends we loved, fellow members of the **church militant**, who have been slugging it out with us here below. They're now members of the **church triumphant**, having come into God's presence to praise, to serve as our heavenly cheering section, to claim the fulfillment of the promises made in Holy Baptism: that because we have died with Christ in those baptismal waters, we will be raised with Him as well. They served, they loved, they sacrificed; they gave of themselves, their time, their treasure; they lived lives of faith active in love: not perfect lives, but faith-filled lives. When we hear eulogies, sometimes it's like every person who died was a Mother Teresa or a St. Francis of Assisi. In honoring someone's memory, after all, we tend to remember the best and not the worst of their lives. And yet there is truth-telling in the final commendation we pray:

Acknowledge, we humbly beseech you, a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own flock, **a sinner of your own redeeming....**

"And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." This fat volume, *New Book of Festivals & Commemorations: A Proposed Common Calendar of Saints*¹ is filled with the stories of more people than I had time to count. There's not a perfect person among them; probably none of them would identify themselves as "a saint." This other book, *The Righteous: The Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust*², touches on the more-than-20,000 Gentiles honored at Yad Vashem, the Avenue of the Righteous in Jerusalem. It is about non-Jews who risked and often lost their lives to save Jews during World War II. There's not a perfect person among them; probably none would self-identify

as “saint,” any more than you would. They might even say, “Anyone would have done what I did, under the circumstances.” But history tells a very different story. Most Gentiles **didn’t** work to save Jews. But these people courageously did what they could do in their usually **small** sphere of influence. But, as we’re reminded at the beginning of the movie, *Schindler’s List*, “To save one person is to save the world entire.”

Erase the notion that to be a saint you have to be dead and you have to have been perfect. To be a saint is to be set apart for God’s purposes. That happened in Holy Baptism, for each of us. Now the challenge is to be who we are: holy sons and daughters of the Most High, workers in the kingdom of heaven, willing to take risks for the sake of the kingdom, willing to pick up our cross and follow Him, whether it’s in our neighborhood or our workplace, in a soup kitchen or on the playing field, in a classroom or in a boardroom, in a hospital or in a factory, in a real estate office or an accounting firm, in the privacy of our own homes or in the public square.

Especially in the wake of the massacre at Tree of Life Synagogue last weekend, and especially because Luther’s vitriolic writings late in his life were used as partial justification of the Holocaust, we Lutheran Christians have a special responsibility for speaking out against anti-Semitism wherever we encounter it. One of the many lesser known people honored at Yad Vashem is a French Capuchin monk named Pere Marie-Benoit. His circle of influence was actually large: he saved thousands of Jews first in southern France, then in the Paris area, by finding hiding places for them in religious houses, by providing them with false documents and with the cash they needed to escape. He called the Jewish brothers and sisters whom he helped his proteges. He did not urge one of them to convert. One woman remembered his exact words to her: “... be a good Jewess.” A couple reported he said to them, “You are Jewish and you must remain Jewish.” This good man had

a profound respect for the Jewish nation as God's Chosen People. He had no fears for their salvation. He poured himself out, following the example of our Lord Jesus.

Gisele Feldman was 7 years old when she received shelter in a village near Le Chambon in southwest France. As an adult she reflected:

“Because of what the ‘Righteous Gentiles’ did for me, because of their ultimate sacrifice, besides mere gratitude, I also feel the need to be the best human being that I can be. I want to be deserving of their sacrifice. I feel that I have to give, to share, to teach love and tolerance. My mission in life is to help make the world a better place in which to live, even in a minute way.”³

A child looking at the sunlit image of a Biblical saint in stained glass, announced, “Oh, now I understand! A saint is someone who lets the light shine through.” That is what we are to do, now and not just later. It requires us to be loving and brave and self-sacrificing, to make ourselves vulnerable to criticism, to being taken for granted, to being taken for suckers, to being on what some will see as the wrong side of the argument. But we are called to be saints in this time and at this place.

Don't doubt: you shine brightly. Thomas Merton once wrote, “You can't just go up to people and tell them, ‘You're shining like the sun.’” But you are. May the Holy Spirit help us all shine more and more brightly, reflecting the Son who said, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12), but also, “**You** are the light of the world.... Let your light so shine before others that they will see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14, 16) Amen

¹Philip H. Pfatteicher, *New Book of Festivals & Commemorations: A Proposed Common Calendar of Saints* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

²Martin Gilbert, *The Righteous: The Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust* (NY: Henry Holt and Co., 2003).

³Ibid, p. 275.

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