

All Saints Day

A man who absolutely hated his wife's cat decided to get rid of him one day. He drove the cat 20 blocks from his home and left him at the park. As the man arrived home, the cat was walking up the driveway.

The next day, the man drove the cat 40 blocks away. He put the creature out and headed home. Driving back up his driveway, there was the cat!

The man kept taking the cat farther and farther away, yet the cat would always beat him home. At last, the man decided to drive a few miles away. He turned right, then left, past a bridge, then took more turns until he reached what he thought was a safe distance from his home and left the cat there.

Hours later, the man called home to his wife: "Jen, is the cat there?"

"Yes," the wife answered. "Why do you ask?"

Frustrated, the man said, "Put him on the phone. I'm lost, and I need directions!"

We, like the cat, are not lost in our wandering. Today we are very fortunate to be celebrating All Saints Day! When this day comes we know that a major celebration has come to the church and the path leads onward toward the feast of Thanksgiving and the Feast of the Nativity or Christmas. The long season of Pentecost is almost over. The saints have gone marching in and they call to us to follow.

The message of this day is "Keep going! Stay on the path. Don't be lost!"

All Saints Day is a big day: the only major feast permitted to transfer to a Sunday. No need to do that this year. It is the centerpiece of an autumn bouquet of three days. These three days begin with the first day of All Hallows Eve, or Halloween, a celebrated Celtic holiday using the power of humor and ridicule to confront death. The second is All Saints Day when we commemorate the victory of God's goodness overcoming darkness and evil embodied in the heroes of faith. These saints make up the Hall of Fame of the Church.

Finally on All Souls Day, now called The Faithful Departed, we honor all of those who strive to complete our journey in faith and transformation into Christ's likeness. This is why each year we honor members of Trinity Church who have died. This year, we particularly remember Carl, Don, Helen and Wally.

At this time every year those who travel down Milwaukee St. are treated to a spectacular burst of color on the large maple just down the street and across from our church. The intense reds, orange and yellows captivate the eye. For the church, All Saints Day is just such a feast of beauty. It is the saints that make the church less of an institution and more of a living thing. Unlike the commercialism of Halloween, and the forgotten All Souls Day, the celebration of all the saints is like an Independence Day. The victory of the saints sticks out with such intensity that the cold and dark world cannot blow out the flame.

As Christians within the communion of saints, we honor those whose lives gave glory to God with the intensity of their faith. They were not afraid to show their true colors, and let their fruits be seen by all.

And the first saint, Jesus Christ, also showed His true colors. He is our Tree of Life! His death on a tree has become life for you and me. Jesus is the Lord of Life, and through Him the saints of all ages sing their song of victory.

Our scripture lessons this morning exclaim the celebration of such saintly blessing.

The 24th chapter of the psalms reads,

- 3 "Who can ascend the hill of the LORD? *
and who can stand in his holy place?"
- 4 "Those who have clean hands and a pure heart, *
who have not pledged themselves to falsehood, nor sworn by what is a fraud.
- 5 They shall receive a blessing from the LORD *
and a just reward from the God of their salvation."

In answer to the question "Who can ascend the hill of the Lord?" the Christian living out his or her baptism can answer, "*I can!*" I can ascend the hill of the Lord. I can stand in His holy place. Yes, we can. Clean hands and a pure heart are what it takes. Not giving over to falsehood or fraud helps the Christian climb the hill of Golgotha. Eating and drinking His body and blood helps transform us into the person of Christ.

The hill of the Lord seems like a tall peak to climb. But, He carries us and walks with us all the way. We seek God's help to find directions. Both the Holy Scriptures and the prayer book are maps that tell us how to get to our final destination. Following the signs and making the stops on the road is half the fun. One of those stops is baptism. We follow the promise of our baptism, not by ourselves, but in the community of the saints.

When we are together, of one mind, helping one another to find directions and being accountable to one another we show the love of God in Christ. That is what it means to be the family of God, to believe in the communion of saints and a holy catholic church.

We sang in our first hymn today a prayer in the song of the saints of God, patient and brave and true, who toiled and fought and lived and died for the Lord they loved and knew. And the third verse sums up for me the message of this day: They lived not only in ages past, there are hundreds of thousands still, the world is bright with the joyous saints who love to do Jesus' will. You can meet them in school, or in lanes or at sea, in the church, or in trains, or in shops, or at tea, for the saints of God are just folk like me, and I mean to be one too. Amen.