

For All the Saints!

I speak to you in the name of He who Is, who Was, and who is Yet to come. Amen! PBS

It's been quite a week. I left on Monday morning for the Sorrento Centre which is near Salmon Arm. I spent four days with Anglican colleagues from around the Diocese of Kootenay and Territory of the People.

It was four days filled with conversation, listening, learning, more than a few tears and lots and lots of singing.

Our Guest Speakers were Archbishop Mark MacDonald; the National Indigenous Archbishop of the Anglican Church and Canada and Melanie Delva, Animator for Truth and Reconciliation with the ACC.

I will be sharing more of what I learned with and from them over the next while. Much of what we covered was very difficult to hear and it will take some time to process.

Today's readings are for All Saints which is the 1<sup>st</sup> of November. It is a movable feast, meaning we can transfer it to other days. All Souls', which is the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November is a fixed feast, meaning it cannot, or should not be moved to another day. All Saints Day celebrates those who have died and have ascended into heaven. All Soul's Day is a day to pray for all souls, those living and departed.

Let me ask you this. A simple question...what does every saint have in common?

The answer? They are all dead.

There is a process to become a Saint. First of all you have to die. Of natural causes preferably, if you are killed then you are considered a martyr. That factors in a little bit later in the explanation.

You need to be dead about five years. This allows for objective evaluation. Saint Bede died in 735, but wasn't declared a Saint for 1,164 years. Five years after the death, or if a waiver is obtained, investigation into the person's life begins.

Next, questions are asked about their life, if it was a good life, or a godly life. Stories and testimonies are collected.

Next, their life is examined and they are presented to the Congregation for Causes of Saints at the Vatican for further examination.

Next, verified miracles need to have occurred. For a person who died of natural causes, two miracles are needed. For one who was martyred, only one miracle is needed. Usually the miracles are healing in nature, received when praying to the specific person, or from being in the presence of relics of the deceased. After this step they receive the title "Blessed".

Finally a Mass of Canonization happens, a cause of great celebration.

The first saints were Joachim and Anne, parents of the Blessed virgin Mary. The latest Saints were canonized 13 October 2019 and among them is John Henry Newman, a cleric in the Church of England who went to Rome and eventually became a Cardinal. Edith Stein was born a Jew and in her teen years became an atheist. She studied to become a nurse in 1915 and after reading the works of Teresa of Avila she sought to be baptized in 1922 and then to enter the convent and become a Carmelite Nun in 1938. She and her sister who also sought holy orders were arrested by the Nazis in 1942 and exterminated in the gas chambers six days after their arrest.

Cheerful stuff, eh? Stay with me.

To our readings of today.

The Hebrew scriptures reading today is from Daniel who writes of a terrifying vision he had of many things involving the number four. It is the stuff of nightmares and in it Daniel says "my spirit was troubled within me, and the visions of my head terrified me." (Daniel 5.15)

The Psalm is one of triumph in which God's people are blessed and the corrupt are bound in fetters (leg cuffs) and in chains of iron.

The Epistle, the letter of Paul to the Church in Ephesus, he is reminding them of their inheritance as God's children. A phrase that is used often by Paul is used here "I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers". (Ephesians 1.16) A wonderful gift to receive, the gift of prayer.

Finally in the Gospel we hear the writer of Luke use words very much like the writer of Matthew's Gospel in what we know as the Beatitudes. In the Lukan version there is a twist...Luke begins with blessings...you who are poor, who are hungry, who weep.

Jesus says "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets (Luke 6.22, 23)

Then, there comes the twist...following the blessings are a bunch of curses..."But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. "Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.

"Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

"Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets. (Luke 6.24-26)

Hold on now...wait a minute.

Wait...which one is right?

Well, they both are. This writing is to remind us not to be complacent. Not to become lazy in our faith...Jesus goes on to remind us that, as followers of Him we need to rise above the hatred. Rise above the muck and mire of those who wish us harm. We are to bless and love our enemies. We are to bless those who curse us.

We are to take being struck by offering the other cheek. Not to strike back. We are commanded to love our enemies. Wait. Our ENEMIES? That's crazy talk!

No, not with God. Not as a follower of Jesus.

This passage ends with what we now know as the Golden Rule

"Do to others as you would have them do to you." (Luke 8.31)

That's hard work. I mean, REALLY hard work.

Why would we want to do this? What SHOULD we want to do this?

Because it is God's way. It is Jesus' way.

Remember, even on the cross Jesus prayed for those who had been spitting on him, whipping him. Those who taunted him and bayed for his blood. "Father forgive them" he said. "for they know not what they are doing". Now that, right there, is grace. Grace of a magnitude I'm sure I do not possess.

Back to the saints...many of them, especially those who were martyred stood up against oppression and injustice. Oscar Romero, a Roman Catholic Priest in El Salvador and eventually Bishop of San Salvador who spoke out against government corruption and social poverty. He spoke openly of the need to love, protect and nurture the poor and the destitute. He was shot dead in 1980 while celebrating Mass. In October 2018 he was canonized and is now referred to as Saint Oscar Romero.

We all know at least one person we would consider a living saint. Someone who has endured much in their life and continues to smile. Someone who struggles, yet never complains. Someone who gives with everything they have and then some.

While they may never receive the title Blessed or Saint, we can celebrate them while they are still with us. We can recognize them as saints among us.

Being a saint is difficult work. Being beatified as a saint is even more difficult, but thankfully someone else does the heavy lifting for that because, well, you're dead.

Being a follower of Jesus is difficult. At times it may seem impossible in a world filled with hatred and injustice. Where first nations communities have no safe drinking water. Where our oceans and forests are being polluted. As I see it we have a choice to make.

We can put our heads in the sand and sing happy songs, think happy thoughts and wait until it all goes away.

OR

We can stand up, speak up, even if our voice shakes, and hold those responsible to task. We just had a federal election and while we may not be delighted in the results, we have voices we can and must use to speak up against climate change. Against pollution. Against systemic racism. Against ageism. Against sexism.

We can, we should, we MUST help our Indigenous brothers and sisters have access to safe drinking water. And while it may seem overwhelming to do it alone, with our lone voice, we can stand together.

Just like one candle can drive darkness away, many candles can illuminate an entire room.

Standing together, shoulder to shoulder, we can make a difference in the world.

How do we do that?

By using our voices, listening, standing beside, and most importantly, by loving.

Giving thanks to God from whom all blessings flow.

Let all God's children say Amen.

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27 October 2019  
All Saints (transferred)

Daniel 7.1-18  
Psalm 149  
Ephesians 1.11-23  
Luke 6.21-30