

Blessed are the Saints Who Inspire Us

Jesus said:

"...Rejoice! For your reward is great..."

"Back in the day" is a saying older people use to talk about things in the past young people won't remember. So, back in the day, before cable TV, when advertisers were in control; when tobacco companies had free reign, one brand produced an enduring ditty: "You've come a long way baby, to get where you've got to today..." Though that 1968 commercial was about the perfect cigarette for women, ugh, it pointed to something important: the fight for women's rights had been successful—up to that point. To make those gains of justice and equality, many women (and some men) paid a dear price. Some of the more prominent women are remembered in the Episcopal Calendar of Saints. Some of them, however, are remembered only by their living family and friends, and some only held in the memory of God.

Today is a day of celebration! It is a day to rejoice as we celebrate and remember all faithful people who have died, whether they are well known across the centuries, currently known to our families and friends, or have passed from current human recollection. They are experiencing that for which we have hope: Resurrection and knowing pure joy in the presence of God and Christ Jesus.

This past week on the Episcopal Calendar we remembered Jesus' apostles Saint Simon and Saint Jude, Bishop James Hannington who was martyred in 1885 by the ruthless King of Buganda, Mwanga II, (Mwanga later repented, was baptized and received into the Anglican Church), John Wyclif, a priest whose theology, in the 14th century, was a forerunner of the Protestant Reformation, and Bishops Paul Shinji Sasaki of Japan, and Philip Lindel Tsen of China who endured persecution and imprisonment during the turbulent times of the World War II era.

Who are the saints that you remember and honor today? You did not know my Grandmother, Edythe Morris. Though it has been 44 years since she died I still hold her dear; she will always be a saint to me—a saint because she was the faithful rock I could

cling to during my own turbulent times. I am sure each of you has a saint you hold dear no matter how many years have passed.

The faithful lives of 20 centuries of Christians is living proof of Matthew's account of Jesus's teaching of how it is to live in the Kingdom of God. For each of these conditions listed in the Beatitudes there is an example Saint we can point to who lived into the Kingdom blessing of that condition. Please refer to page 10 of your bulletin (*Matthew 5:3-10*). As I read the list of conditions I want you to consider who you know or know of who was blessed because they were

- * Poor in spirit,
- * Mourning,
- * Meek,
- * Hungry and thirsting for righteousness,
- * Merciful,
- * Pure in heart,
- * Peacemakers,
- * Persecuted for righteousness' sake,

Like Saint Mary, the faithful said yes to God and God blessed them. Their blessing has been passed down through the centuries so that we, today, experience the fruits of their labor.

Whether it is a favorite Apostle, another Saint, or a close relative we are being inspired to carry on their legacy of living the Gospel into the future.

I encourage you to be creative in thinking about how to do this. What I have to offer here is nothing new. It is a reminder of our obligation to honor the work of the Saints who have gone before us by continuing their work.

The first suggestion I have is to take a "God given gifts" assessment. It might be fun to do this in a group—I would love to do it with you. Then:

Make a pledge of your time. Yes TIME; in employing your gifts through volunteering in various ways here at St. Barnabas. Without you, this Church cannot reach out to our wider community in partnership to actively participate in God's dream of everyone being loved and cared for.

For those of us who are financially able, your monetary pledge means that St. Barnabas can continue to provide the spiritual nourishment we all need through worship services in person and on line, adult education, and programs and education for our children and youth; as well as keeping the lights on. It also creates funds for assisting the needy in our parish and in our wider community.

When Jesus's apostles came to him asking him to send the crowds away so they could get something to eat; what did he say to them? Right, "You give them something to eat." In other words, we are to actively participate in that part of the Lord's Prayer when we say, "Your Kingdom come, your will be done; on Earth as it is in Heaven."

With that in mind, we can use our voice through voting. I am not talking about the vote for president. I am talking about voting on the things that really matter; those things that are about creating opportunity for greater justice for our community; justice for the poor, the outcast, the friendless, the sick... Remember, when you vote, you are voting for "God's Kingdom on Earth as it is in Heaven."

The last suggestion is to share our faith journey stories. I know I have been encouraged and inspired by the stories you all have shared with me.

My faith journey in short: My Grandmother Edythe took my siblings and me to church every Sunday. She also took us on other excursions like to see the Spring fields of flowers. As I grew into adulthood I spent some time in a wasteland wilderness of separation from the God and Jesus. I finally met my husband whose church turned out to be my way back to God and Jesus which led to my ordination. I am happy to have coffee with you and share more and hear your story.

When we think about the faithful Saints, what made them rise to such a level that we would call them Saints? Isn't it their undaunted faithful work for the same justice Jesus modeled and taught? So it is our turn to rise to that same faithful work.

The Saints who have inspired and lead the spread of the Gospel of Christ over the past 20 centuries are numerous. The memory of them and their stories gives us cause to rejoice because through their work—including their suffering—God's dream has come a long, long way toward justice, equality, and inclusion.

Let us rejoice! The Saints and All the Faithful Departed have received their reward and have left us a great legacy.

Let us bless the Saints who have gone before us by continuing to lead, to inspire, and to stand up and actively further that Dream of God so that future generations will also say: "We've come a long, long way" and "blessed be God's Kingdom now and forever!" (Hold out hand for congregation to say, Amen)