

AN APPEAL FOR SAINTS

INTRODUCTION

You may have noticed from the heading on your bulletin that today is ALL SAINTS' DAY, and that the title of the sermon is "An Appeal For Saints". Since the year 835 AD, the first of November has been the day on which Christians remember with deep gratitude the great men and women of the faith - the saints, that is, if you will permit me to speak of them in that way. Just as there are honor students in any school or college, so there are those within the tradition of the Christian Church who have gone all out for honors. These are the men and women whose lives have been exceptional and remarkable. These are the men and women whose lives we honor on such an occasion as this - people like Paul and Barnabas, Augustine and Aquinas, Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena, Calvin and Luther, Wesley and Whitefield, Lincoln and Lee.....

WHAT ARE THE QUALITIES OF MIND AND SPIRIT THAT WE LOOK FOR...

This past week as I was preparing this meditation, the question that kept coming back into my mind in connection with all of this was something like this: what do we look for and expect to find in the life of a "saint". In other words, what are those qualities of mind and spirit that we expect to find in the life of someone who has gone all out for honors, shall we say, in the Christian life. We know from our own experience that when a teacher comes to grade a student in the classroom, he looks for certain things. First of all, he looks to see whether the student has a knowledge of the facts. The student has to have a knowledge of the facts; he has to be acquainted with all of the material or else he's apt to fail. And then too the teacher looks to see whether the student has the ability to handle the facts and all of the material intelligently and imaginatively. I remember when I was in 10th grade and struggled through geometry. It was a terrible experience for me. We had to memorize something like 100 theorems, and then too we had to be able to apply the theorems to different problems. Although I had memorized all of the facts, my trouble was that I couldn't handle all of the facts intelligently, and I barely passed the geometry regents. So I think it's safe for me to say that the student who gets the A is the one who has not only mastered all of the material, but who also has demonstrated the capacity to think creatively and the ability to apply the facts to a situation.

Now I'm going to draw something of a parallel here and suggest to you that there are certain things that the outstanding Christian must have. I would suggest to you three things, and I would do this briefly. First of all, the outstanding Christian must have a knowledge of the faith. He must know what it's all about. He must have the facts. And then in the second place, the outstanding Christian must make some attempt to practice the faith, and this he must do with some degree of success. But then there is something else. In the third place, the outstanding Christian, the Saint, if you will, must have an extraordinary capacity to love and to care.

THE CAPACITY TO LOVE

I'd like for us to linger for a moment or two at this particular point in the meditation and ask you to think seriously about this capacity to love - not in reference to someone else, but in reference to your own life. It seems to me that this capacity to love is simply the capacity to lose your life in someone else. That's about it, isn't it. The capacity to love is the capacity to lose yourself in someone else. Almost anything you can

think of is easier to lose than to lose your life in someone else. For instance, you can lose your money overnight. You can lose your health in the twinkling of an eye. You can lose your virtue far more easily than you think you can. You can lose your mind when you least expect to. But to lose yourself completely in someone else is a different matter. It's always with you. You can never seem to get away from it. It often gets in your way. You know how it is....it's difficult to shake yourself loose from all of your secret desires, your ambitions and from your tendency to always think of yourself first, to shake yourself loose from all of those things which make the center of what you call your ego.

Now if we were to carry all of this one step further, I think we'd discover that the only time that people ever lose themselves is when they become completely absorbed by something else. Let me give you a simple example. For instance, have you ever watched two real chess players playing chess. They become so completely absorbed by the game that they become totally unaware of anything that is going on around them. You can speak to them. You can shout at them, and they may not hear you. They've lost themselves completely in the game.

Once again I would draw something of a parallel here and suggest to you that the A students in Christianity are those who have become completely absorbed by Christ and his teachings. Like the chess players I referred to a moment ago, they have lost themselves in the greater game of life. But unlike the chess players they are not unaware of what is taking place around them. On the contrary they are very aware of what is taking place in the world around them. This may sound strange to some of you; it may be alien to your present way of life and your outlook on things. You may be saying to yourself, "Well yes....I admire this man Christ. I'm interested in the Christian movement, but I find it difficult to understand how anyone could ever be completely absorbed him". And yet the amazing thing is that they are - absorbed not only by his personality, but also by the activity of his spirit in the world....so completely absorbed by him that everything else fades into obscurity and unimportance except as it relates to him.

There have been people and there are people today who have been so completely absorbed by his teachings and his spirit that they lose themselves in Him. And do you know this that as they begin to lose themselves in Him some strange things begin to happen. These people begin to lose some of their fears; they lose their vanity, their hollowness. They begin to lose their impatience with others, their little jealousies, and their petty animosities. They begin to find a freedom to move at ease in the world because they are no longer concerned with themselves and afraid of what might happen to them. They begin to discover a power that enables them to do things that they thought they would never be able to do. And above all, they become translucent. They become people through whom this light shines. You and I have known people like this, people that have a vitality that comes not from their own personality alone, but comes through them. You see people like this from time to time....the saints...the honor students of the Christian life.

GET TO KNOW SOME OF THEM

I wish I had more time to develop this thought with you this morning. I always feel a bit rushed on Communion Sunday, not having the opportunity to preach a full length sermon. (Maybe that's why the congregation is

becoming larger on Communion Sunday). About all I can do is to launch an idea and hope that it will grow in your thinking. But before I finish, let me just suggest one or two more things to you, and I'll try to be as brief as possible. Any teacher will advise the average students in the classroom to get to know some of the A students, the honor students, the idea being that perhaps something will rob off on to them, and I would take the liberty of suggesting to all of you that you take time to get to know some of the honor students in Christianity. Read Albert Schweitzer's book "Out of My Life and Thought. It's a great book. But be careful for it may change your life and your thinking about certain things. Or read "The Little Flowers - The life of Saint Francis". It may be that as you get to know some of the honor students in the history of the church that something of their life will rob off on to yours. It may be that you may decide to go out for honors. It may be that you will discover that you have gifts that you have never used and capacities that you have never developed, and that you're not quite as good a Christian as you thought you were or could be. There may be some things in your life that ought not to be there - fears, conceits, animosities. You may come to the point where you say to yourself "I'd like to be something more than just an average, grade C Christian. I'd like to try to go all the way"

And one final word. There really isn't anything that the world needs today more than it needs a few honor students in religion..... people who have lost themselves completely in something which has totally absorbed them, namely the love of God in Christ so that they can bring that renewing, healing touch into the poisoned areas of life where person is often pitted against person, race against race, church against church, country against country. It may not be easy. It may require taking a few chances, sticking your neck out, saying some things that may not make you the most popular students in the class. For some of you it may mean rising above social customs, refusing to be bound by the customs of the community.

I don't know if I've said anything here this morning that will accomplish anything at all. At least I hope so. Anyway as the 1st of November comes around year after year, keep in mind the thought that this is the day when the honor the great men and women of the faith. They have gone on to the world beyond this, and we are surrounded by these witnesses who have lived in obedience to the will of God, regardless of the cost. Their influence is still felt, and today they are saying to us something like this: "Refuse to accept defeat. It can be done. We have done it. You can do it too. Only keep your eyes on him. This is what we did. And we hope you will do the same!"

LET US PRAY:

God, Our Father, we thank thee for the lives of men and women who have loved thee so very much that through them thou hast been able to speak to us. We think of the saints of our time, and how they have lifted the level of life for us. Help us to accept the responsibilities that come to us as thy disciples, to live in obedience to thy will, regardless of how great the cost that through us something of thy love and power may again pour forth into the world. Amen