

"SAINTS IN THE MODERN WORLD"

INTRODUCTION

This morning we look into the treasure chest of Christian heritage and tradition for a starting point for this communion meditation. Last Wednesday, November 1st, was celebrated in many parts of the Christian Church as All Saints' Day. For 1,132 years Christians have paused on that particular day to honor their dead, to remember their loved ones who have passed on to the world beyond this one.

WHO ARE THE SAINTS

I realize that many of you, like myself, have been brought up in a branch of the Protestant tradition that makes very little of this particular day and therefore you may have questions regarding it. For one thing, you may wonder when we speak of the "saints" who we have in mind? On occasion you may hear of your friends in the Roman Catholic Church speak of St. Benedict, or St. Dominic, or St. Catherine, or St. Francis, or St. Ignatius. When we speak of the "saints" do we have in mind only those who have been officially elected and elevated to this position by the Roman Catholic Church, or are we thinking in broader and more basic terms? When I speak of the "saints" I have in mind for the most part men and women like yourselves whose lives have been touched in some very real way by the life of Christ, men and women whose lives have been truly remarkable in terms of Christian stature - people like Paul and Barnabas, Augustine and Aquinas, Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena, Calvin and Luther, Wesley and Whitefield, Lincoln and Lee and scores and scores of others, some well-known and some not quite so well known, but all of them people whose lives have been touched significantly by the life of Christ. These are the people that we have in mind when we speak of the "saints" of the church.

CAPACITY TO LOVE

I think that if we were to carefully study the lives of these giants of the Christian life that we would discover that all of them had one quality of mind and spirit in common with each other. All of them possessed the extraordinary capacity to love and to care and to be concerned with the lives of other people. The capacity to love. This quality would stand forth in the lives of all these persons.

The capacity to love. Suppose we think about this here for the next few moments in reference to our own lives. Have you ever stopped to consider that this capacity to love is simply the capacity to lose one's self in the life of another person. Isn't that about it? The capacity to love is the capacity to lose one's self in someone else. And isn't it true, too, that it is far easier to lose other things than it is to lose one's life in someone else's life. For instance what I mean is that you can lose your money overnight. Or you can lose your health in the twinkling of an eye. You can lose a loved one in the matter of seconds. You can lose your virtue or your integrity far easier than you think you can. You can lose your mind when you're least expecting too. You can lose your friends by losing your temper. All of this we know because we have experienced it. BUT to lose yourself completely in the life of someone else is a different matter. This is more difficult. It's always with you. You can never seem to get completely away from yourself. It's so difficult to shake yourself loose from all of your secret ambitions and selfish desires, from all of those struggles that take place behind the closed doors of your life, from all of those things which make the center of what you call your ego.

HOW DOES ONE GO ABOUT DOING THIS

You ask: how does one go about doing this? Perhaps these "giants" of the faith have something to say to us, perhaps we can find something of a clue by looking at their lives.

Their lives point up this thought (and here we come to the heart of this meditation) that the only time people ever lose themselves completely is when they become completely

absorbed by something else. Their lives were so completely absorbed by Christ and his teachings, so completely absorbed by the power of his personality and by the activity of his spirit in the world that they forgot themselves and began to think a great deal about the lives of other people. Hence, there came about in their lives this amazing capacity to really love, to really care, to be really concerned about others.

And perhaps as they lost themselves in Him some rather strange things began to happen in their own lives. Perhaps they began to lose some of their own fears and anxieties. Maybe they lost, too, some of their illnesses. Perhaps they lost their pride, their vanity, their hollowness. Perhaps they began to lose some of their critical nature, their little jealousies, their petty animosities, and their impatience with others. As they lost themselves in Him, they came to find a freedom which enabled them to move at ease in the world, with grace and confidence, because they were no longer concerned with themselves and afraid of what might happen to them.

SAINTS NEEDED TODAY

One additional thought here at the end before we share in the Sacrament. The world today is just crying out for more and more of these giants of the Christian life, pleading for people who have lost themselves in something greater than themselves, 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, nation against nation, ideology against ideology, church against church. It may not be easy. These "saints" of the Christian life tell us that it was not easy for them either, and that often it requires taking a few chances, of sticking your neck out, of saying things that are not destined to one any popularity contests. For some it may mean rising above social customs, refusing to be bound by traditions of family, community or country.

As the 1st of November comes around year after year and you are reminded of All Saints' Day, remember that this is the day when we pause to honor the great men and women of the Christian life. They have gone on to the world beyond this, and you and I are surrounded by these witnesses who have lived in obedience to the will of God, regardless of the personal cost. Several years ago after a similar meditation on the theme of All Saints Day, a gentleman of this parish mailed me this little card. I keep it tacked on the bulletin board by my desk for I like its message. Entitled, "Why Were the Saints, Saints", it says:

Now I would ask you to bow your heads in prayer as I read you a prayer written by Francis of Assisi, often referred to as Saint Francis:

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life"