

All Saints Sunday, November 5, 2023
“Sainthood and Stewardship”

Today is a day of celebration. It is first of all a celebration of hope in that today is All Saints Sunday, the day we remember all those who have died in the faith since last All Saints Sunday. In addition, it is the day we anticipate our own eternal reward. We celebrate the hope we have as children of God. It is also a celebration of promise. We come to receive the sacrament of the altar and the promises inherent in that holy meal; the promises of life, salvation and the forgiveness of sins. Finally, it is a celebration of our stewardship. We celebrate the blessings of God passed along to us from those who have gone before us, and the blessings of God we, in turn, will pass along to those who come after us.

The title of my sermon is *Sainthood and Stewardship*. What do sainthood and stewardship have to do with one another? What is the relationship between being a redeemed child of God in Christ and the use of our time, talents and treasures? And where does the sacrament of Holy Communion fit?

When we think of saints, we usually recall those who have led faithful and exemplary lives or those who have been canonized by the church. But in the New Testament sense, being a saint means being made holy before God by the redeeming power of Jesus Christ. Our second reading from First John says this: *See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.* As baptized Christians, we are claimed by God as his own. We are reborn in Christ and become inheritors of everlasting life with him. This is a wonderful gift of love and grace given to us by our Savior; but it is not just a one-time gift. Baptism is a life-long process. Each and every day – through the power of the Holy Spirit – God continues to work to make us holy. That’s what we call sanctification. Simply put, because God is working to sanctify us, you and I are saints. In baptism, we have been adopted by God, clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and consecrated for his service. Therefore, the sainthood we receive in Baptism commits us to a certain way of life, one in which we show love, respect, and faithfulness toward God and one in which we display love, compassion and generosity for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

As you can see, the life of a saint is demanding and disciplined; and because of the presence of sin in our life and world, we often times fail to measure up. In fact, many times we fail miserably. We look at ourselves and the life we’ve led, and we don’t feel like a saint of God. Or we look at the woman in the pew beside us or the man sitting in front of us, and say, *Yeah, right! If they’re a saint, then I’m the king of England.* We tend to be pretty skeptical that we and those around us would be considered saints; but that’s the way God’s kingdom of grace works.

We are saints, not because we do everything right or lead exemplary lives, but because we are clothed in the garments of our Lord. His life, death and resurrection define who we are, not the sin in which we participate. We are made holy because Christ makes us holy. That’s what Martin Luther meant when he said that we’re both saints and sinners at the same time. Sin makes us less than what we want to be – and certainly less than what God calls us to be – yet, at the same time, Christ’s transforming power is at work in us to make us worthy of sainthood, worthy of being called children of God.

So, as members of this great company of saints, as members of the priesthood of believers, we come to the communion table, trusting that in, with and under the bread and wine Christ is present to forgive our sins and renew his promise that, because we are his, we will one day feast at the eternal banquet table with all the saints who have gone before us. In fact, this is a present reality. Every time we come to the table, we gather here not just with members of our congregation, but with all God's saints – living and dead. It is within this community of believers – that God sustains us with his love and grace to continue our journey in this life. In this communion of saints – the saints of old and present-day saints – we feast on the body and blood of Christ, receive the gifts of grace he offers, and anticipate the glorious life to come when the saints go marching in and God's promises are fulfilled. So, you see, we are called saints not because we are sinless people, but because we are forgiven people; because we are Easter people, because we are people with a promise, and people who stand in a right relationship with God through the grace he gives us in his Son.

Therefore, because we have been so blessed by God, it is our proper response to express our gratitude to him by dedicating to his service our lives and all that he has given us. That's what stewardship is all about: the wise and thankful use of the resources with which God has blessed us. Truth is, those who most deeply realize that they are forgiven and redeemed are those who are most ready to show their gratitude to God. So, sainthood and stewardship really do go together.

Let's think of it in terms of our own congregation. Today we celebrate all those people who are a part of our spiritual history here at Reformation – the saints of old, if you will. Look at what they've passed on to us. Through their witness and ministry over the past 76 years, they have left us a legacy of faith so that we, too, may know the love and grace of God. They have left a legacy of faith through Sunday School or VBS lessons taught, through anthems of praise sung, through service as worship assistants or leadership in the church, through weekly fellowship and encouragement, and the list goes on. Through their commitment and generosity, they've left us a beautiful sanctuary for us to worship and a hall where we can enjoy Christian fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

These saints of old were people just like you and me who, through word and deed, wanted to share the good news of the gospel with those they knew and with those who would come after them. Were they without spot or blemish? Certainly not! But Jesus was, and they knew that. They knew that because he gave his sinless life for them that they were blessed; that they were children of God. And in response to their many blessings, they acted in courageous, self-giving, dedicated and faithful ways. They reached deep into their wallets and purses, they freely gave of their time, they willingly shared their talents, and they made decisions about their lives based on their faith – not always perfectly, but nevertheless, confidently, because they were robed in Christ.

Do you see the point I'm making? Because they practiced faithful stewardship, because they gave of themselves and their resources to expand the kingdom of God in our world, we are now the beneficiaries of their commitment. Because of the saints who have gone before us, we have come to know the saving power of Christ Jesus and his promise to be with us always, even to the

close of the age. So, you see, we're back to where we started. Sainthood and stewardship are really two sides of the same coin. Where you find one, you'll find the other.

My friends and fellow saints, we have much to celebrate on this All Saints Sunday. And we have much to share so that we, too, might leave a legacy of faith. God, the giver of all we are and all we have is waiting for our reply to his gifts. How will we answer? My prayer is that all who come behind us find us faithful. Amen.