

All Saints 2016

Revelation 7.9-17; Matthew 5.1-12

Friday is a good day of the week for me. Friday is my day off and I have Colin by myself while Emily works and Madeleine attends school. Two Fridays ago I told Colin that today would be an errand day—picking up a few groceries and getting ready for the weekend. After we made our customary stop to look at riding mowers—mow-mows in Colin-speak, I said, ‘hey buddy we have a special stop today. We’re going to a new place for just a few minutes.’

I pulled into the Farragut Town Hall, the early voting station nearest our home. I could see his little brain trying to process what was happening. You can’t explain democracy and the electoral process to a 2 year old, but the voting stickers at the end of the experience kept him engaged in the process. ‘Buddy, let’s get ready to push the buttons today and then we can get our stickers.’

We waited in line for about 2 minutes before I received my 4 digit code, assigning me to a voting booth. After a few moments, I entered the selections God confirmed upon my heart, choices that will remain between the Lord and me. Before I pushed the red ‘cast vote’ button, I paused. I had my Red Sox hat on, but took my hat off and began praying with my son, ‘Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy.’

In those silent moments, I thought about the child I was holding, wondering what America will become as he enters his school years. I wondered how I would prepare him for the years ahead, uncertain as those years are.

Some days later I heard the answer—his preparation began long before we entered that voting booth. God began preparing him for the years ahead when he baptized him in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. His preparation for the future began when the saints at Apostles said that day, “We welcome you into the household of God. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood.”

This child is being formed by stories of saints gone before; he's being nourished with the Body and Blood of Christ from his earliest days. He's more ready for uncertain years than I even know. And you are too. //

God can make a way where there is no way. Regardless of how you voted on November 8th or the days before, you and I will wake up to a wounded and divided America on November 9th. But elections cannot heal countries. Remember the ancient counsel from the Psalms: put not your trust in princes, in whom there is no salvation. Only the Prince of Peace, the King of Kings, can heal our national wounds. And his Name is Jesus. Jesus has given his saints all things necessary to become sources of healing and hope in this world: bread and wine, water and word, presence and promise, vocation and vision.

So on the cusp of these important days for our nation, I remind you of Jesus' words to his disciples, 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Do not be afraid. Believe in God, believe also in Me.' Jesus spoke those words in an elevated space—the Upper Room—before he sent them into the world with his mission. Today we worship both in an elevated space and time. We're assembled in *this* Upper Room with the Lord. And the Lord has gathered us to celebrate All Saints Sunday just days before our national election. What a gracious gift.

You've probably heard the saying that every Sunday is Easter Sunday. Each Sunday—both in season and out of season—we celebrate that Christ is risen. Yet every Sunday is also Ascension Sunday, too. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann said that every time we gather at the Lord's Table, we ascend into heaven. We ascend into heaven in worship, not to abandon the world, but to be sent forth into the world with hearts made new by a vision of heaven.

My brothers and sisters, we need to ascend to the very throne of Jesus today. We need to rise above the anxieties of this present moment; we need to transcend the trappings of partisan politics. We need to see once again that Jesus Christ reigns over *all* nations at the right hand of Father, where angels, archangels, and the whole communion of saints surround him with praises. Ages,

generations, rulers and kingdoms have come and gone on earth, yet the praises of God never cease in the kingdom of heaven—'Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen¹.' If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth².

To set our minds on heavenly things, I want us to meditate on three marks of the saints. The saints are people of **love, peace, and joy**. [Repeat]

The saints set their minds on things above. And what do the saints see when they set their gaze above where Christ is? We see Christ dwelling in a communion of love with the Father and the Holy Spirit. To gaze into heaven where God is is to behold a vision of love.

The Lord who commanded us to love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and to love our neighbor as ourselves is the same Lord who dwells in the great mystery of divine love. We were made in the image of God who is love. Our destiny is to be conformed in the likeness of his perfect love.

When we gaze into the heavens we will see not only the Lord who is perfect love, we see the saints who were made perfect in love. All the saints worshipping the Lord were healed by the sacraments given through water, bread, and wine. All their struggles, all their suffering, all their failures have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

Saints are neither superheroes nor superhuman. They are human beings who come to the Lord poor in spirit, mourning, meek, hungering and thirsting for righteousness. You see, saints are human beings with clay feet who have been transformed by the love of God. As Jacques Philippe said, 'We don't all have in us the stuff of sages or heroes. But by God's grace we do have the stuff of saints.'

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Re 7:12.

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Col 3:1–2.

That is the baptismal robe we put on when we received the sacrament that made us God's children.³

I love the humble meekness and hope in St. Faustina of Poland, a 20th century saint. In the midst of her frailty, she was enraptured by the love of God. She writes, 'in spite of my wretchedness and littleness, I have my trust deeply anchored in the abyss of Your mercy, my God and my creator! In spite of my great wretchedness, I am not afraid of anything, but I maintain the hope of singing my song of praise for ever. Let no soul doubt, even the most pitiful, so long as they are still alive, that they can become a great saint.'⁴

When you encounter the love of God, you become a person of great love *and* hope. Why? Because the love of the Lord endures forever. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.⁵ We can be saints of great hope in these troubled times because we trust the love of the Lord endures forever.

When love comes to reign in the hearts of the saints, we experience **the peace of God**. Jesus says very clearly in the Beatitudes that peacemakers are called the children of God.

It's interesting to trace the theme of conflict in the Beatitudes. Not only does Jesus bless peacemakers, he speaks blessing over his persecuted followers, he says that we are blessed when we are falsely accused of wrongs for his Name's sake. Jesus' kingdom is not built on sentimentality and his saints are not soft. 'Peace is not placid, to quote Madeleine L'Engle. 'Peace,' writes L'Engle, 'is/ The power to endure the megatron of pain/With joy.'⁶

It takes courage and strength to practice meekness in a loud and rancorous age. It can be exhausting and lonely to assume the role of peacemaker in the

³ Jacques Philippe, *Interior Freedom*, 43.

⁴ St. Faustina, *Petit journal*, 140.

⁵ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), 1 Co 13:7.

⁶ Madeleine L'Engle, *The Ordering of Love*, "Sonnet, Trinity 18"

midst of entrenched conflicts. Yet Jesus promises that saints who pursue peace bear the resemblance of his Father.

Think for a moment about the next few months. You and I probably won't influence political conversations on a national stage. But you have great influence over the conversations that happen around your dinner table. You can be a source of the Lord's light, peace, and love around your Thanksgiving table. I hope you're thinking about and preparing for those family gatherings later this month and also during the Christmas season. We're hoping for peace in Washington, but what about becoming peacemakers in our homes, our schools, our workplaces?

We can be people of peace in the world because that is what we practice each week. We exchange the peace of Christ. And then we come to this Table—the Table that symbolizes the healing of divisions: division from God, division from one another. The Table of the Lord brings healing and peace.

In the 19th century, the Duke of Wellington attended an ordinary Sunday Eucharist service at a parish church in England. But it was no ordinary time for the Duke of Wellington—he had just been honored as a hero in the Battle of Waterloo. When he came forward to kneel at the altar, a poor and ragged old man came to receive communion beside the duke. A nervous deacon suggested that the old man move or wait until the duke had received communion. Instead, the Duke of Wellington clasped the old man's hand saying, 'don't move; we're all equal here.' //

God heals barriers and divisions, making us one at his Table. God feeds *all* his saints at his Table. And he means to send *all* saints forth with joy that come seeking his mercy.

So finally, we come to **joy**. I've shared this experience in past years, but I'll share it again. A few Octobers ago I went out for a Friday mid-morning run along a familiar route. My final mile concluded on the Jean Teague Greenway which runs adjacent to West Hills Elementary School. When I passed the West

Hills Elementary playground, recess was in full swing and I saw a wonderful sight. I saw children of several races playing together. Asian children swinging next to Hispanic children, both laughing together. African-American, Indian, and Caucasian children playing tag together. I didn't know one child on that playground, but I prayed a two-word prayer over the whole playground—All Saints. Lord, may all these wonderful children made in your image become saints in your kingdom.

St. John's vision of saints from every tribe, tongue, and nation ought to change the way we see our world. I want to ascend with John into heaven and see what John sees. For when I ascend to John's vision, I see that the government is upon the shoulders of the Prince of Peace. I see the full the communion of saints, sons and daughters from all nations worshipping the Lamb of God. The heritage of the nations, the riches of culture, the beautiful colors of skin—all the beauty and treasures of the saints magnify the Lord of glory and the saints are filled with joy.

Yes, when my eyes behold that vision, I can live in this nation and this time, filled with the hope and joy of the Lord. We need not know or fear the future. We need only remember the faithfulness of God in times past.

My brothers and sisters, we can people of love, peace, and joy because this is our heritage. The saints of God have been witnesses of love, peace, and joy in all generation. In our time, we still affirm the words of Dame Julian of Norwich who said, "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." Those are not vapid or sentimental words. Dame Julian wrote those words in the time of brutal wars—the era of Hundred Years War and the War of the Roses. She endured the era of the Black Plague and the age of England's tyrannical king, Richard II. And still the hope of Christ rang out from this marvelous saint: "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." //

Do you what I thought about as I drove away from my polling station two Fridays ago? I thought of the words spoken by a little Italian man about 700 years ago. I thought of St. Francis of Assisi, a man who lived in a time of much greater conflict than we have known. As I drove home, I prayed his words of peace that I may bear the light and love of Christ in this generation. As we approach this Table that heals us, to be sent forth as Christ's ministers of reconciliation, would you please pray St. Francis' Prayer with me?

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we 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. Amen.