

All Saints' Sunday, Year B  
November 3, 2024

Back in my days as a church musician, my least favorite Sunday was the final Evensong before the choirs broke up for the summer because it was Choir Awards Sunday. There were a half dozen or so categories, many named for a former choir member or bishop or dean of the Cathedral and my husband had to choose the most worthy recipients; of course a certain amount of subjectivity was unavoidable. My two favorite awards were "Best Attendance" (no prejudice involved there) and "Most Improved," which in many similar situations is code for we-had-to-give-her-something, but in this case meant she was the hardest worker of the lot. My discomfort was based on what about the ones who didn't get mentioned? Weren't they just as notable and faithful contributors?

I think of those days as I think of today, as we remember generally recognized and established saints of old as a focus of All Saints' Sunday as well as All Soul's Day when we remember loved ones in our personal lives, because what about all those we've forgotten or those the Pope didn't authorize for whatever reason.

What makes a saint? The word is derived from the Latin "sanctus", or "holy." In the Roman Church, authority is centralized in one person who is the final word on canonization, and there is a rather lengthy process including proof of x-number of miracles performed, only one of many criteria established in the late medieval period when the Church had existed for less than half of its present life. The Anglican Episcopal Church recognizes most of the saints and days of commemoration authorized by Rome, just as we have inherited many of our liturgical patterns from Catholicism. In the introduction to *A Great Cloud of Witnesses*, the Episcopal Church's collection of commemoration of saints, we are told that in addition to these generally accepted saints, through the years since publication of the 1789 prayer book but especially with the 1960s and '70s revisions, recommendations of locally commemorated people are encouraged to be submitted to General Convention for sainthood candidacy and voted for or against by our governing body, thus expanding authorization practices. A glance at the inside cover of *A Great Cloud of Witnesses* indicates Copyright 2016, by The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America: interspersed with

Western European and British Commonwealth commemorations, many from hundreds of years ago, are Martin Luther King, Jr, the Martyrs of El Salvador, James Weldon Johnson, Anna Ellison Butler Alexander, Albert John Luthuli to name just a few.

What makes a saint? What makes a life holy? Our collect says these elect God has knit together have lived virtuous and godly lives; but our sequence hymn says a saint is “just folk like me” who I might encounter in the supermarket or a restaurant. Folk just like me aren’t so virtuous, particularly in the supermarket. When I was quite young, five or so because I wasn’t yet old enough for the choir, the woman in charge of Sunday School – these days “Director of Christian Formation” - was Eleanor something; she must have performed some act of kindness which I witnessed because I remember telling my mother later that day, “she must be a saint.” My mother sort of grunted disapprovingly and said she wouldn’t exactly call her a saint. Wondering what makes a saint – virtuous and godly or ordinary – I believe that’s the answer. We are all ordinary and we are all special. God puts us together to work things out and we are free to choose a life devoted to others or to ourselves. One of the mysteries of human behavior is those of us dedicated to ourselves occasionally make the mistake of being kind to others, just as those in service to others can so easily make an innocent remark that devastates someone we care about.

I believe we are all of us capable of being saints: when God walks by one of us and touches our soul, God gifts us with the opportunity of giving those around us a glimpse of what God looks like. The day that you are a saint is the day you say or do something that allows me to see God. Saints are in us and among us to remind us of Jesus Christ, the exact image of God, to remind us what Jesus was like when he lived among us so that we can say, “Ah, yes, now I remember: the Way, the Truth, the Life. This is the way we should be; this is the truth we should tell; and this is the life we are to follow.”

#### **FROM ECCLESIASTICUS OR WISDOM OF SIRACH:**

#### **HYMN IN HONOR OF OUR ANCESTORS**

**44** Let us now sing the praises of famous women and men;  
our ancestors in their generations.

<sup>2</sup> The Lord apportioned to them great glory,  
his majesty from the beginning.

<sup>3</sup> There were those who ruled in their kingdoms  
and made a name for themselves by their strength;  
those who gave counsel because they were intelligent;  
those who spoke in prophetic oracles;

<sup>4</sup> those who led the people by their counsels  
and by their knowledge of the people's lore;  
they were wise in their words of instruction;

<sup>5</sup> those who composed musical tunes  
or put verses in writing;

<sup>6</sup> rich men and women endowed with resources,  
living peacefully in their homes—

<sup>7</sup> all these were honored in their generations  
and were the pride of their times.

<sup>8</sup> Some of them have left behind a name,  
so that others declare their praise.

<sup>9</sup> But of others there is no memory;  
they have perished as though they had never existed;  
they have become as though they had never been born,  
they and their children after them.

<sup>10</sup> But these also were women and men of compassion  
whose righteous deeds have not been forgotten;

<sup>11</sup> their wealth will remain with their descendants  
and their inheritance with their children's children.

<sup>12</sup> Their descendants stand by the covenants;  
their children also, for their sake.

<sup>13</sup> Their offspring will continue forever,  
and their glory will never be blotted out.

<sup>14</sup> Their bodies are buried in peace,  
but their name lives on generation after generation.

<sup>15</sup> Let the assembly declare their wisdom,  
and the congregation proclaim their praise.