

Rev. Jane Courtright 'Monkey Business' (Luke 6:20-31) Nov. 3, 2019

Praise to God! Sing to God a new song,
Sing God's praise in the assembly of the faithful
for God takes pleasure in the people...
Let the faithful exalt in glory!
Let them sing for joy on their couches!

Words from Psalm 149!

Did you know that in the New Revised Standard Version, the faithful are called Saints? Guess that's why the lectionary committee chose this psalm for reading on All Saints Sunday! Good choice too, a hymn of praise such as this one is appropriate as we remember the saints who have gone before.

Some of the people we remember....the saints....are people whose incredible lives are captured in stained glass windows. Or more contemporary people like Mother Theresa, the saint of the gutters in Calcutta who has been formally recognized as a saint in the Roman Catholic Church.

"In her," said the late Pope John Paul, "we perceive the urgency to put oneself in a state of service, especially for the poorest and most forgotten, the last of the last." I think most people figure Mother Theresa is a saint, whether the church says so or not! She was quite a woman!

But we are here today to remember not just famous saints - the Peters and Pauls, the Luthers, the Calvins, the Wesleys. We are also here to remember the faithful pastors and Sunday School teachers, patient youth leaders, talented organists ...and many more....

We remember loved ones who are family or friends...Those people who may be anonymous to most of the world but who are known and loved well by us because there were there on our journey of faith, as we grew up and matured, on life's ups and downs...And we thank God for them!

Were these saints really saints? Were they perfect? No, and they would probably be the first to say so. It was Reinhold Niebuhr who said, "The saints ought to be at least as decent as ordinary folk," And we wish that was always the case, but,

as anyone who has spent a life as part of the church or part of a family can attest, there are many unsaintly saints wandering around out there.

But today is not the day to criticize or list shortcomings.

It's like this ancient Joaquin Miller poem says:

There is so much good in the worst of us,
and so much bad in the best of us,
that it hardly behooves any of us
to talk about the rest of us.

Let me share with you a couple of quizzes created by Charles Schultz. You know him....he created the Peanuts comic strip. You don't have to answer out loud. Just listen & think as I read them & you'll get the point.

1. Name the 5 wealthiest people in the world.
2. **Name the last 5 Heisman trophy winners.**
3. Name the last 5 winners of the Miss America pageant.
4. **Name 10 people who have won the Nobel Peace Prize.**
5. Name at least ½ dozen Academy Award winners for best actor & actress.
6. **Name the last decade of World Series winners.**

HOW DID YOU DO?

Charles Schultz's point is that none of us remember **ALL** the headliners of yesterday! There are **NO** *second* place winners of the list. They are the best in their fields. But applause dies. Awards tarnish. Achievements are forgotten.

Trophies and certificates are buried with their owners.

Here's another quiz. See how you do on this one:

1. **List a few teachers who aided your way through school.**
2. Name 3 friends who have helped you through a difficult time.
3. **Name 5 people who have taught you something worthwhile.**
4. Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated...special.
5. **Think of 5 people with whom you enjoy spending time.**

EASIER? That's because the people who make a difference in your life are not the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most awards.

THEY'RE THE ONES WHO CARE.

And as I told the children, we are also here today to celebrate YOU – a saint of God. God knows that sometimes that is the hardest saint to accept!
So I thought I'd end this meditation with a jewel of a story!

There was a king who held court every day. He would sit on his throne wearing his robe and crown as the people of his country would come to him stating their needs & requests. Every day, in addition to all the people who would come to the throne, there was a holy man dressed in a beggar's robe who would come to the king. The holy man would hand the king a piece of fruit, which the king would receive and hand over to one of his assistants.

Then the holy man would leave without ever saying a word to the king. This went on for many months and even years. Then one day something happened that no one expected.
No one knew that a monkey had gotten loose in the palace!

When the holy man presented his gift of fruit to the king, the monkey jumped up on the stage and grabbed the fruit out of the hand of the king!
Then the monkey took a bite out of the fruit and all were amazed at what they saw. Precious jewels fell out of the fruit!

The king quickly turned and asked his assistant what he had been doing with the fruit. The assistant said that they had been throwing the fruit through the window of a locked room. When they opened the door of that room,
They found among the rotten & decaying fruit a fortune in jewels!

So much of the time, we forget that we are made in the image of God.
That each one of us has a spark or two of the divine with us.
God knows the wondrous potential in each of our lives.
If you and I can accept the magnificent gift that each of us IS...
Then, as Dr. Suess said, "Oh, the places you will go!" AMEN!

