

November 2, 2025
All Saints' Sunday C
Trinity Church, St. Louis
The Rev. Dr. Paul Jacobson, *Rector*

Daniel 7:1-3,15-18

Psalms 149

Ephesians 1:11-23

Luke 6:20-31

*In the Name of God: the Father of glory, our Lord Jesus Christ
& the Spirit of Wisdom. Amen.*

As we gather this morning to celebrate All Saints' Sunday, we give thanks to God for the blessings that the saints have bestowed upon us as individuals, as well as upon the church. Of course, this leads us to ask the question: who is a saint? What makes a saint?

There are, of course, the all-stars of the saints' parade, the well-sung heroes of the faith: apostles, evangelists, and martyrs; matriarchs and patriarchs, in addition to the folks whose stories we tell throughout the church year. And there are saints Paul refers to when commending the Ephesians for their "love toward all the saints." These saints are those who, like us, are called to be holy. My former bishop, would always begin her sermon, "good morning, saints!"

Of course, there are also the saints whose stories are held fast in the collective memory of this parish community – their names on bookplates tucked into prayer books and hymnals, engraved on vessels and embroidered on vestments. Their pictures occupy places of honor in our homes, and many have been lent to us for this month of remembrance.

I invite you to close your eyes for a moment, and bring to mind those saints of Trinity whom you hold dear, whose shoulders we stand upon – and then speak their names into this space.

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This week, I've been thinking a lot about light. Not so much about the "saints in light" as about saints as reflectors and transmitters of Christ's light.¹ In his 2011 mystery thriller *First Lady*, Michael Malone has one of his characters, a priest, reflect on saints.

"What makes a saint? If stars are the light, then I'd say saints are people the light shines through. Not just the famous saints, because the famous ones are stars, too. But

¹ Cf. Malcolm Guite's sonnet *All Saints*, which begins, "Though Satan breaks our dark glass into shards / Each shard still shines with Christ's reflected light."

the everyday saints around us in the world. Light shines through them and illuminates what they see. The light just goes right through them to what they love so that we can see its beauty. They don't get in the way because they're looking too."²

Saints are people the light shines through, and they're everywhere. As we turn to think about the gospel, hold on to that thought.

At first glance, today's gospel lesson feels very familiar. After all, it's the Beatitudes. Well, sort of. Most of us usually think of Matthew's version of the Beatitudes from what we call the "Sermon on the Mount." We love these verses even if they're a bit impersonal. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Or "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy." The pronouns are almost all in the third person: "they."

But that's not the version we have today; Luke's gospel is personal and immediate. "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." Or, "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled." Poverty, hunger, mourning, hatred, exclusion, revilement, and defamation – these things don't sound like blessings!

Of course, the Jesus of Luke goes on. Now, he's not bestowing blessings, he's issuing warnings. I've taken to calling them the "woetitudes." Woe to you who are rich now; woe to you who are full now; woe to you who are laughing now. You've received your reward already, and your status will change.

As we've seen in our progress through Luke's gospel, this is not a new theme: remember the Magnificat! *He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.* Luke is constantly showing us how GOD is at work in the world in and through Jesus.

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Is this blessing/woe teaching simply about the haves and the have-nots? Is it just about money? I don't think it's about money itself, but it is about our love for money (cf. 1 Tim. 6:10). It's about the way we use money – and what it buys – to protect ourselves, to create an illusion that we are self-sufficient, that we are not vulnerable, that we are not dependent on God. We are keen to prove we are not poor or hungry or sad or unloved or any of the rest of it. And we strive to create this illusion because...

Vulnerability is uncomfortable. Vulnerability is also what makes us human. And, when we try to numb those things that are uncomfortable – sadness, or grief, or

² Michael Malone, *First Lady*, p. 426.

helplessness – we also numb our capacity to feel joy, or satisfaction, or happiness. And we blunt our sense of empathy for, and our companionship with, the rest of humanity.

No matter how hard we try, no matter how thick our walls or solid our gates, we are still plagued by insecurities. We continue to find it hard to love others (or ourselves). And we still shade our eyes from the reality that, at the end of our striving, each one of us is headed for a hole in the ground. We are all vulnerable.

When we rely on ourselves and not on God, the light may shine upon us, everyone might be able to see us, like we're in a spotlight. But, when we rely on ourselves and not on God, the light of God cannot shine through us; it is blocked. When we are opaque; we are not saints. Saints are the people the light shines through.

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On All Saints' Sunday, we remember those who now rest from their labors and have moved to the nearer presence of God. I don't think anything reminds us of our own vulnerability, our own mortality, more than the death of those we love. And in this, we are like every other person that has walked this earth. No one is exempt from death or loss or grief.

In many ways, All Saints' Sunday is a personal, practical enactment of those words we heard on Ash Wednesday, six months ago: *remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return*. We are all but dust. And the yearly commemoration of All Saints offers us the opportunity to give thanks to God for those we love but see no longer, those who have returned to dust, and caught up into the promise of the One who created us all from dust, and continues to raise the dead to new life in Christ.

The Church, at its best, can be a place that reminds us that vulnerability is not something to shun or deny. It is here that we listen to God's promises to meet us precisely where we are vulnerable or needy or broken. In Luke's Gospel, this is why Jesus comes down to the plain to bless those whom the world has ground down and calls losers, and to warn those who think that they are "all that" apart from God.

So then, maybe vulnerability and transparency are related. And that, just maybe, to recognize your own vulnerability is what it means to be a saint. Not to be perfect, like a plaster statue, or even to be particularly pious, but to be vulnerable, and out of that vulnerability to turn to God in need.

Week by week, when you come to the altar and open your hands to receive Holy Communion, you proclaim in your own body your need and your desire to be fed by God. But that's not the end of the story, is it? One of our core values as a community is that our devotion to the Real Presence on the Altar leads us to devotion to the Real Presence in our neighbors.

On All Saints' Sunday, we remember our common bond with Christians of all times: people of all sorts and genders, rich and poor, of all ethnicities and races, from all times and places, joined together as one Body not because of who we are, or what we have, or what we've done, but because in Christ, God calls us saints, calls us holy, and sends us into the world to witness to God's grace and goodness.

In these troubled days, we are besieged by those who shout, "Look at me! Look at how bright my light is!" God be praised that we are also surrounded by everyday saints with pots and pans to prepare food for those who hunger, or to make noise at protests, saints who knit, or sing, or visit, or read books to others, or who offer kind words of welcome or comfort. The list is endless. Saints are everywhere, just look for the light that shines through them, maybe even through the windows of this building, illuminating the neighbors God has given us to serve. The light just goes right through to those we love so that we can see their beauty.

My dear friends in Christ, take a moment and say again the names you remembered at the beginning of this sermon... Then, with the eyes of your hearts enlightened, give thanks for all the saints: past and present, all those who surround and uphold us. Oh, and by the way, there's not any reason, no, not a one, that you couldn't be one too. Amen.