

All Saints' Day, 2009

Text: Matthew 5:1-12

Title: Love Gives Gladly

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Today is All Saints' Day.

When you think of a saint what do you think of?

Typically, when we think of someone who's a saint, we think of two things- Someone who lived a good life, and someone who has died. Now that's not necessarily wrong, but it's not all there is to being a saint, and that's not the place to start when we talk about saints. We don't start with good works, and we don't start with death. It starts with the Lord.

A saint is a holy person.

"Holiness" is hard to define, hard to understand. God is Holy. Holiness is what makes God God. Only God is holy in and of Himself. But God shares His holiness with us. He makes us holy, like He is.

The Holy Spirit is the one who makes you holy, who sanctifies you, makes you a saint. The Holy Spirit bears the holiness of God and makes you holy.

We are not holy in the same way that God is Holy. God is holy in and of Himself. You are holy only as you receive holiness from God.

Think of holiness like electricity. God is the power plant, generating electricity. You are a house. As long as you are connected to the power plant, you have electricity. You can run your lights and your appliances and your TV and your computer. But if the lines that connect you to the power plant are cut, you're in the dark.

God has given us channels, conduits, like the wires that bring electricity into your home. These are the means of grace, the ways that God gives you His holiness.

We know that through the means of grace, through the Word and the Sacraments, the Holy Spirit makes us holy. The Holy Spirit can always work in other ways. You can get electricity by being struck by lightning, but with the means of grace we have God's promise that He will always be here, working through these specific, holy ways.

It starts right here at the font with Holy Baptism. This font is where God makes people holy, makes them saints.

In the past year, two new saints were made here at this font- Rachel Ruth Kampenga and Brayden Edward Konrath. They were made holy as they received the holy name of Jesus.

Jesus marked them as His own and set them apart to be His saints. The old sinful person in them was drowned in the baptismal waters, and a new person was born to live a holy life. The Holy Spirit came down through the word and in the waters of Holy Baptism He made Rachel and Brayden saints.

God's holy, baptized people are tempted to live unholy lives, to live not as new people but as the same old sinful people.

And so the Lord gives us Holy Absolution, where the words of forgiveness make us holy once more, and restore us to our baptismal grace. As we confess our sins and hear the words of forgiveness, once more the Holy Spirit makes us holy.

And then we hear God's holy word. His word creates and strengthens our faith, making us holy and filling us with His life.

And if that weren't enough, the Lord gives us His holy body and His holy blood in the Holy Supper. As we eat His body and drink His blood, He makes us holy.

All of this is what the Holy Spirit does to make you holy. It's all His work in making you a saint.

You don't wake up one morning and decide you want to be holy. You don't become a saint by trying really, really hard to be a good person. You are a saint only as the Lord makes you holy through Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, Holy Word and Holy Supper. These are the means that the Holy Spirit uses to make you holy, to make you saints.

If you cut yourself off from these holy things, you loose the holiness God has given you, as surely as if you cut the power coming into your house, the lights will go off.

But if you stay connected to God's holy things- holy baptism, holy absolution, holy word and holy supper, the Holy Spirit will continue to come to you and make you holy.

You are holy. You are saints. Because you are saints, you do things differently. You live very differently from the rest of the folks around you. All this is because of what the Lord does to change and transform your life. You aren't a saint because you live a holy life, you live a holy life because you are a saint.

In the beatitudes, our gospel lesson today, Jesus describes what a saint looks like, what a saint does, how a saint lives.

Saints are poor in spirit.

Saints mourn.

Saints are meek.

Saints hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Saints are merciful.

Saints are pure in heart.

Saints are peacemakers.

Saints are persecuted.

These are holy things. This is what the holy life looks like. Saints do all these things because the Lord makes them holy.

All of these things can be summed up in one word: "Love". Saints love.

Saints love God and one another. Saints show this love in concrete ways by how they treat one another. You can see the love of God flowing through His saints. Saints show mercy. Saints make peace. Saints are pure and humble in heart.

This sounds a lot like Jesus. Jesus was poor in spirit, Jesus mourned, Jesus was meek, Jesus hungered and thirsted for righteousness, Jesus was merciful, Jesus was pure in heart, Jesus was a peacemaker and Jesus was persecuted.

All this Jesus did out of love. He became humble and meek, He showed mercy and made peace, He was persecuted and gave His life for you because He loved you.

Jesus loved and Jesus gave.

Saints love and saints give.

Love gives. Two weeks ago we saw that love gives everything. Last week it was love giving freely. This week love gives gladly.

Saints give even their own lives, and they do it gladly. "Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven."

Saints are glad to give, happy to give, even if it means giving their own life. Saints know that the things of this earth pass away, they spoil and they fade. But the treasure we have in heaven will always endure.

On this All Saints Day, we remember particularly the martyrs of the faith, those who gave their lives for what they believe. For them, no cost was too great, no price too dear to pay in return for what Jesus had done for them. They were glad to be chosen worthy to give their lives out of love.

Saints give even to the end. And the example that they set for us continues long after they're gone. This year we laid to rest Rosemary Peterson and Viola Witt. They loved and gave faithfully to those around us, and they left us an example to follow.

And even though they have died, we know that those who die in faith will rise again on the last day.

So yes, saints do live good lives, but it's only through the Holy Spirit making us holy. And yes, saints do include those who have died, but many saints are still alive, and those who have died will live again.

Saints love and saints give, because the Lord has made them holy.