

## **November 6, 2022 - All Saints Sunday**

### **Prayer of the Day**

Almighty God, you have knit your people together in one communion in the body of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Grant us grace to follow your blessed saints in lives of faith and commitment, and to know the inexpressible joys you have prepared for those who love you, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### **Gospel Reading - Luke 6:20-31**

[Jesus] looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

"Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

"Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

"Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

"Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.

"Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

"Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

"But I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you."

### **Sermon**

Just for fun, I started Sunday's reflection with a bit of a quiz!

I asked the congregation for an off-the-cuff definition of "holy." They came up with words such as "pure," and "spiritual," and "designated for church use." My computer's dictionary suggests these:

- Dedicated or consecrated to God or a religious purpose.
- Devoted to the service of God.
- Morally or spiritually excellent.

While I have no issue with the first two, the last one makes me shake my head. How many of us think of ourselves as "morally or spiritually excellent"? Me either!

Then I asked for a definition of "saint." Responses were "my mother!" (and yes, the mother of the person who said this was in church!), "believers in Christ," and "people who see others as more important than themselves."

Again, I went to my computer's dictionary, and found these:

- A person acknowledged as holy or virtuous and typically regarded as being in heaven after death.
- A Christian believer (this is the understanding that is used by the biblical writers, by the way).

Needless to say, I much prefer the second understanding. The first sounds much too medieval for me!

I then asked for a definition of “theology.” This one raised a bit of a groan! But some answers did come back with things like “the study of God,” and “knowledge of the Bible.” The dictionary said,

- The study of the nature of God.

This is fine, as far as it goes, but I think more needs to be said.

My last question was for a definition of “reflection”; not what sun light does off the water(!), but in phrases like “theological reflection.” This one elicited responses such as “thinking deeply,” or “looking inside for answers or insights” (I liked this last one). My computer said,

- Serious thought or consideration.

And with that, the “quiz” was over. Whew!

Now, the purpose in asking these questions was *not* to try to see if we could come up with the “correct answers.” The purpose was to try to get us thinking in similar terms about some of these words, because these words can be thrown around pretty haphazardly on All Saints Day. Quite frankly, it’s a wonder that any communication takes place at all. Our assumptions and expectations get in the way, and it is terribly difficult to hear anything new.

As an example of our assumptions - How many of you consider yourselves to be “economists”? No one raised their hands on Sunday, and I suspect most of you will say, “Not me.” But you *should* raise your hand, even if you don’t have degrees in economics, or earn your living by crunching numbers for the government.

You make economic decisions every day. You look at how much money you have in the bank, or how much will be deposited at the beginning of the month. You look at the price on items in the store or on the web-site. You calculate (at some level, anyway) how much you need that “thing,” and you decide to buy it. Or not. You have made an economic decision.

Granted, you and I are not *professional* economists. We might not have letters after our name on our business cards, or get paid to forecast economic trends. But we *are* economists; practical economists. We make economic decision, based on the information we have in front of us, all the time.

In the same way, how many of you are theologians? (Yes, this is a trick question.) All of you should be raising your hands right now! You may not have a degree from a seminary; you may not have read all of Luther’s Works; you may not be able to recite the Bible from memory. But don’t kid yourselves; you *are* theologians. Practical theologians.

You ask theological questions every day. You have theological *discussions* in your heads every day. You respond to theological issues all the time.

Sure, sometimes they are more obvious than other times. When we are at the bedside of someone who is dying, and we silently ask, “God, where are you right now?”, we are asking a theological question. When we e-mail the church to set up a date for a grandchild’s baptism, we have made a theological decision. When we bring food for the food bank to church on specific Sundays, we are engaging in theological reflection on the holiness of food, and the holiness of the neighbour who is in need.

You *are* theologians. Practical theologians.

And it is important to remember this on this All Saints Sunday. The people we remember today, whether they died in the third century of our era, or in the Reformation era, or seven weeks ago, were people who did theology in their own, practical way. And as a result of their reflection, they reached out to us with the love and grace of God.

And we *also* remember that we, *you and I*, have been called to this journey as well. We are called to reflect on the good news, how it has impacted us, and share our reflections with each other and our hurting world. This is *not* about being “morally or spiritually excellent”! It never *has* been,

and never will *be*! Which is a major part of the good news! It's not about being perfect. We are saints, God's imperfect people through our baptism into Christ, called to do our practical theology in the full knowledge of our failures and foibles, while at the same time trusting the grace and goodness of God which comes to us and through us, each and every day.

So, what the definition of holy? You and I, claimed by God for the expressed purpose of sharing love.

What's the definition of saint? You are I, claimed by the grace of God to be vehicles for the grace of God in this world.

What's the definition of theology? Faith intentionally wrestling with what faith means in this time and place, for the sake of the world.

What's the definition of reflection? Looking inward, to discover the love and grace of God which has been promised and given for the sake of the world.

As we celebrate those who have died, we also celebrate those who live, and who walk with us. And we celebrate that, by travelling this road together, we, too, will be vehicles for God's love and grace to be lived out, and shared, and seen, and experienced.

Even *if* our understandings of important words is different from the dictionary! Amen.

### Prayers of the People

A - We offer our prayers to God, trusting that, because of Jesus' promise, we will be heard.

[*Short pause*]

A - Holy God of holy ones, we give thanks for those who have touched us with your love. We especially remember those who have died in the last year.

GRACE

Boyd Nowe

Ray Greek

Carolyn Walsh

Joanne Shauffenburg

Karen Colp

Harold Uhlman

ZION

Linda Walters

Doug Meisner

Betty Cleveland

Bruce Dares

Paul Chopek

Give us joy in what has been. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Holy God of holy ones, we give thanks for those who *continue* to touch us with your love: friends, family, neighbours. Give us joy in what *is*. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Holy God of holy ones, we give thanks for being able to touch *others* with your love. Accept our gratitude for calling us to be your hands and feet. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Holy God of holy ones, open the eyes of your church to see your presence with those who are *not* considered "holy." Open our hearts to experience your presence in ordinary moments. Open our mouths to share your presence with this hurting world. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Holy God of holy ones, we discover you with the sick, with the dying, with the addict, with the stranger. Use us to bless those who we name before you.

[*Long pause*]

God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Holy God of holy ones, we admit that we too frequently miss seeing your holy ones. Forgive our self-centredness, and free us to serve with all those whom you called "blessed." God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

P - Into your hands we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C - Amen.