



Bob Buettner, Don Rusher, Jr., Linda Wright: if you got those three together to sit at a table for the eternal feast, you would have three rather different individuals from unique walks of life, not the same personalities or perspectives on the world. It might make for a rather interesting dinner conversation to sit in and listen. But, there is one thing that Bob, Don, Jr., and Linda all had in common, as you will notice looking through the back of the bulletin, not just in the written descriptions, but the pictures as well. They all had a passion for animals, particularly the canine variety. You'll notice both Don., Jr., and Linda at one of our special blessing of the animals services. Bob also staunchly supported the charities that protected and helped animals. After all, on this All Saints Sunday, although we recognize

that God calls all of us to be saints from the beginning, we just as much recognize we need some help in pulling it off throughout this life. And yes, we need all the help we can get in whatever loving and compassionate form we can find.

For myself, growing up on the farm, there was always a dog around, and the one that was there the longest during my adolescent years was an English Springer Spaniel named Gus. Yes, Gus was cute and at times cuddly and loving and compassionate. But because Gus was an English Springer Spaniel, he was also incredibly territorial. Whenever my mom went to bed, he went into the room along with her. And whenever someone came close to that room, he would growl with this subtle but intent rattle to let you know that you better not come in there. The problem was that Gus lived through my teenage years when I had the propensity of not always being in my bed in the preferred time of my parents, and whenever I got to a certain stair that would creek by my parents' bedroom, my cover was definitely blown by Gus. It was as if he was under the impression that he had to protect my mom, not just out of a sense of canine duty, but because that was the person who showed him the most love and compassion and companionship, and he couldn't help himself but show that in return.

That is another thing held in common by Bob, Don, Jr., and Linda: they all had this sense of God's love and compassion and companionship for each of them throughout their life, and they could not help but do the same in return, not just to Jesus Christ, but to their family and close friends, not to mention to us as their cherished siblings in Christ. And like with all of us, they needed some help in doing their part as saints. They needed help in being disciples of Jesus Christ, called, in our own special way, to bring God's hope and grace to life to those around us. They not only looked for that precious aid from their loved ones and the church, they also latched onto God's creatures, too.

Yes, the canines of the world are often referred to as "man's best friend," because they have this way of insisting on loving us even when we come home from a bad day amongst humanity. They insist on wagging their tails even if we did not do so well with our jobs or with our callings as disciples of Christ. They insist on snuggling up next to us even if we believe this whole world is on its way to you know where in a handbasket. They don't seem to care, because they believe their whole world is sitting right in front of them. There's something we can learn from God's creatures, the same ones Bob, Don, Jr., and Linda cherished throughout their lives.

In the end, there will be bad days as the living saints, but it's still worth showing love anyway. There will be times when not everything goes according to plan with the church, with our stops at the grocery store or the doctor's office, but it's still worth showing compassion anyway. There will be times when we wonder if this world is worth God's care and attention whatsoever, but it's still worth doing our part as saints of hope and grace, no matter what. Because no matter how much we lose faith in this world that God adored to the point of a cross and a tomb, God will insist on guarding this territory with a love that will never be matched by any amount of evil and hatred that emerges among us. God will insist on setting up shop in our very heart and guarding that holy space with compassion and a companionship of Emmanuel, God with us throughout anything that can ever happen in this life.

And yes, in this life, we are called to be saints, as was Bob, Don, Jr., and Linda. However, they didn't have to earn those titles. It was given to them from the beginning, because God was under the impression that they had more than enough Jesus Christ in each of them to share with the rest of us. Regardless, we will still take all the help we can get in learning to do our part in caring for one another, in following the footsteps of our Lord into whatever territory of life it takes us. And on this All Saints Sunday, not just for those who have died, but for us, too: we are thankful for the ultimate help bestowed on us in Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord, the holy help that will never be taken away now and forevermore. For that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!