

Sermon ☩ November 7, 2021

John 11:32-44

Frank H. Maxwell

I begin this morning with a list of names. these are saints . . . people who have in some way or shape had a profound affect on my faith and my ministry. Some are known to you and some unknown but I hold them before you this morning as significant saints in my personal faith development:

Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther, Thomas Merton, John the 23rd, Peter Marshall, Paul Roth, Betty & Chet Maxwell, Bernard Lindelof, Bill Dehnert, Paul & Irma Lueck, Larry Marquardt, Barb Hansen . . . Barb MacDonald.

What a progression of saints. (And by no means a complete list). These are people who; with their very lives, have shown me something of God's face, something of God's way.

Dependence upon them is not enough, however; we must "pick up" where they left off. These concerns are bound up in the meaning of All Saints' day.

The day itself . . . originally a feast to honor martyrs and confessors.

Those who confessed Christ not only by death but also by imprisonment or exile. In the early days (200-300 AD) the Christians were accustomed to solemnize the anniversary of a martyr's death for Christ at the place of martyrdom.

In the fourth century, neighboring dioceses began to interchange feasts, to transfer relics, to divide them, and to join in a common feast. Frequently groups of martyrs suffered on the same day, which naturally led to a joint commemoration. Eventually, the number of martyrs became so great that a separate day could not be assigned to each. But the Church, feeling that every martyr should be venerated, appointed a common day for all.

All Saints Day has come to be a remembrance of persons whose commitment to God; expressed in so many ways, has made a contribution to the faith of those who come after them.

One isn't born a saint or so elevated through anybody's formal announcement. A saint is a saint because of faith and commitment and perseverance.

Frederick Buechner: *"In his holy flirtation with the world; God occasionally drops of handkerchief. These handkerchiefs are called saints."*

The writer of Hebrews was talking about saints when he or she wrote in chapter 12: *"Therefore; since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses; let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely; and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us."*

This is a challenging call to Christian faithfulness. We are challenged by the actions of those who have gone ahead of us. All Saints' Day is a good day to stop and check "our course".

Some saints are remembered by name . . . others more easily by their experiences. But they are remembered. And it may be the courage of a faithful saint which gives us the courage to face our own challenges. I do what I do, in part, because of the example set by others.

Again, we do not merely celebrate the saints or remember them; we do not simply lean on them . . . we continue in the directions they have pointed us.

We may not be able to run the race as rapidly or as effectively as they did. But run we shall. In our span of life . . . with whatever calling and whatever gifts we have . . . we fulfill our share of the race.

And it is an understatement to say that the race of faith will not be easy. The running itself is difficult and there are many diversions. This is where we, again, rely on the saints.

We see what we see and reach what we reach . . . at least in part . . . because of being able to stand on their shoulders. Riding on the shoulders of another can be important (watching parade as child).

Take a few moments today and remember those people who let you stand on their shoulders. Why is it that you come to church? Who has influenced your faith? And as you think of these folks . . . thank God for them.

Even as we keep running our part of the race of faith . . . we need to give thanks for those who ran ahead of us.

Lord of heaven's reach,
of earth reborn;
you call us from starless graves
to sing under infinite skies:
we praise your name
for those who have walked this way
unheralded and unnumbered
but known to you,
their beginning, their end,
their joy in life;
give us the same grace
to be unbound
and take the step of faith; through Jesus Christ, the alpha
and omega. Amen.

~ Fr. Steven Shakespeare, Church of England