

Christ Church Cranbrook

Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

Sermon for November 4, 2012 ~ All Saints Sunday

The Reverend Ronald D. Pogue

To the saints of God in Christ Church Cranbrook, greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Saints.” I called you “saints.” Does that surprise you? If it does, perhaps it’s because we’ve done such a good job of substituting other words to identify those who have been joined to the Risen Christ. Let’s see how many I can name: members, communicants, parishioners, disciples, Christians, congregants, and, my *least* favorite, volunteers. There is more to being a saint than any of these words can possibly convey because, you see, only God can make a saint.

We’re going to help make some saints here today when we baptize some children and some adults. By water and the Holy Spirit, they are going to be sanctified through Baptism. They are going to become “holy ones of the Most High” who “shall receive the kingdom.” None of them, especially the children, has “volunteered” to have the waters of Baptism poured over them. They have been drawn here and brought here at the call of Jesus Christ to receive a gift that is too valuable to come as a result of anything we think, say, or do. We are going to pour some water over them, rub some oil on their heads, and declare that they are saints – baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, sealed by the Holy Spirit, and marked as Christ’s own for ever. You and I are going to vow to do whatever it takes to help them grow to claim the new identity given to them today, to be formed as we have been as saints of God.

The redemptive work of Jesus Christ is liberating. He calls people to a new way of life that makes it possible for us to experience true freedom, liberated from whatever enslaves us, whatever binds us, whatever commands a loyalty from us that draws us from God and our neighbors. The work of the saints is to carry on the liberating work of the Incarnate One wherever we may be.

That point was driven home to me in a powerful way the first time I visited the ancient village of Bethany and the site that has long been revered as the Tomb of Lazarus. At the entrance to the tomb, we read the same gospel passage that was read to us today. Then, we went down into the tomb. The passageway was so narrow and the steps were so steep that we had to go in one at a time. The thought occurred to me that was a bit macabre to travel half way around the world to go down into a grave. However, as I stood there in that confining space and imagined being sealed into it, I began to desire the light of day, the air, my companions on the journey, and the freedom outside that prison. I began the climb to the surface and imagined I was in a birth canal. When I emerged, I saw my traveling companions standing there waiting for me. As I looked at them, I heard the words of Jesus, which were spoken to that crowd standing there and gawking that day when Lazarus came forth. Jesus said, “Unbind him and let him go.” Set him free. Liberate him. Do not stand in the way of the life of liberty I have given him.

You and I, saints of God, are called to do just that in our own day, wherever we may be! And today, we promise to do that for these who receive new life through the waters of Baptism. As we renew the Baptismal Covenant, we promise to do that for each other and to allow the Church to do it for us. We promise to watch over one another in love.

Whatever else the Baptized may be called during the course of their lives, in God’s eyes we are saints – blessed, sanctified, made holy, not by our own will but by the will of God. We are saints of God by grace

and adoption. Above every other reason, when we return here week by week to worship with other saints, we return to be reminded who we are and to give thanks, to offer Eucharist, for the divine gift of and vocation to sainthood. For we were created by God to bear a divine image, to be shaped and formed by the will of our Creator, to be filled with the fullness that only God can give. And, when our worship is ended, we are sent back out into the world as liberators of those whose lives are limited by shame, oppression, poverty, addiction, loneliness, pride, ambition, wealth, and a million other obstacles to true and lasting freedom. “Unbind them,” says Jesus, “and let them go.”

We are saints, holy ones, and this is what saints do. You and I have been made holy not by volunteering, which is an assertion of human volition, human will. We have been made holy by the Divine Will. Our life in Christ takes us beyond being volunteers. Jesus speaks directly to us when he gives the command, “Unbind him.” Blessed John, Blessed Barbara, Blessed Phil, Holy Elise, Holy Michael, Holy Lauren, Saint Kathy, Saint Amanda, Saint Clay – Unbind them, and let them go!

A colleague of mine enjoys telling of a time when a little boy was visiting his grandfather, whose church had beautiful stained glass windows like ours. The little boy asked his grandfather who the people in the windows were. His grandfather told him, “Those are saints.” And the boy exclaimed, “Oh, I get it! Saints are people that the light shines through.”

Saints of God, you and I are people through whom God’s light shines. Throughout our lives, as our wills are transformed and we grow less resistant to God’s grace at work in us, the light of Christ shines more brilliantly through us as we are sent forth into the world and “run like sparks through the stubble.”

I recall a wonderful woman who often used an expression that has all but vanished from our language. She would say, “Be a saint.” “Be a saint and help me with these packages.” “Be a saint and run to the store for me.” “Be a saint and help me with the dishes.”

Jesus call to us is to “Be a saint.” Or, even better, “Be the saint I have created you to be.” Be a saint and help me feed the hungry. Be a saint and help me raise the children to know, to love, and to follow me. Be a saint and help me heal the sick. Be a saint and help me deliver my message of God’s love. Be a saint. Be a saint. Be a saint.