

The Church of the Good Shepherd

Lexington, Kentucky

Sermon for November 7, 2010 ~ All Saints Sunday

The Reverend Ronald D. Pogue

To the saints of God in the Church of the Good Shepherd, 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 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 this morning when we baptize two little girls. 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.” And I promise you, neither of them has volunteered to have this holy water poured over them any more than they have volunteered to be born white, born to their respective parents, or born into these families. Neither will they volunteer to have their vaccinations, learn to wear clothes, take baths, or brush their teeth. They won’t volunteer to stay with the babysitter, go to school, come home before curfew, or fall in love. This morning, without their knowledge or consent, 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.

Whatever else they may be called during the course of their lives, in God’s eyes they are saints – blessed, sanctified, made holy, not by their own will but by the will of God. And, by virtue of the fact that someone baptized us, so are we. 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.

Did you notice how St. Paul refers to the saints in the passage we read from Ephesians? In this passage, St. Paul celebrates the life of the Church as a unique institution in God’s eternal purpose, where the saints live in unity with God, one another, and those who have gone before us. We sometimes speak of the Church’s message, but if you read St. Paul carefully, you will see that it is the other way around. It’s not so much that the Church has a Message as that the Message has a Church. The saints, who **are** the Church, are the delivery system for the Message. That is our inheritance.

And consider the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes describe the Blessed, the Saints, those who have been made holy not by volunteering, which is an assertion of human volition, human will, but by the Divine Will. Our life in Christ takes us beyond being a volunteer. Luke’s version of the Beatitudes speaks directly to us, not to “them.” Blessed are **You** – Blessed John, Blessed Barbara, Blessed Phil, Holy Elise, Holy Michael, Holy Lauren, Saint Kathy, Saint Amanda, Saint Clay. Here, the heart of the Gospel that enlivens and blesses all the saints of God is found. These “exclamations” are not a set of self-help sayings. Neither are they philosophical reflections on ways to govern life. They are not therapeutic ways

of correcting dysfunctional lives. They are not information about what would make life better. They are not even a prescription for godly living. They are above all the way the Gospel looks when it appears in the person of Jesus Christ from whose lips they come and who lives within us today, filling us with a divine presence. In this sense they are truly “in-forming,” a filling full of the emptiness of this life and reforming the way we understand and live life. It is what his presence in us causes us to become when he claims our hearts. Blessed. Holy. Saints.

This fullness is not our own doing. Hopefully, we have exercised our unique vocation as human beings and exercised faithful stewardship over that fullness. But it is not our own doing. The fullness is from God and belongs to God who in our creation gave us breath of life.

Today, we are privileged to be reminded that all blessings flow from God. We are honored to renew the baptismal covenant that unites us to God and all the saints. We are blessed to surrender our wills to the Divine Will by making a new commitment to God to be faithful stewards in the coming year. By sharing the fullness, we provide for God’s work through the primary delivery system God has established for doing God’s work – the Church – and God gets the credit, the thanks, and the praise. St. Paul explained this to the Corinthians: “You will be enriched in every way for great generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God; for the rendering of this service not only supplies the wants of the saints but also overflows in many thanksgivings to God” (2 Cor. 9:11-12).

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.

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.