

## **“The Honor Roll of Faithfulness”**

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East Cobb United Methodist Church  
All Saints' Sunday  
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Scripture: Luke 6:20-31

One of my favorite pastimes is genealogical research. Through the vast resources available today, I have found family members going back many centuries in many countries. I would like to say that all of them have been majestic oaks in faithfulness and character, but the truth is that some of them were more like blackberry bushes! Today we celebrate All Saints' Sunday. We remember the majestic oaks - those persons who have influenced our faith development, whose presence is still felt in our lives even though they now rest from their labors. All Saints' Sunday is a time to remember and give thanks to God for those who have lived and died in the faith. I understand that sometimes our earthly families have not provided the best life examples to follow, so we have looked to the faith community for spiritual mentors and have always found them here. With these thoughts in mind, come with me, now, to a mountain where Jesus is teaching. He begins with a list of Beatitudes. These Beatitudes form a picture of the life of a saint. On this All Saints' Sunday, let's consider three of the more difficult of these Beatitudes to see if you and I might qualify.

### **Saints are persons who live their lives trusting nothing other than God.**

"Blessed are the poor in spirit," said Jesus, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Now Jesus isn't extolling the virtues of poverty. He is extolling the virtues of faith in God. God is our ultimate source of security. We think if we have enough money, enough land, enough possessions, enough whatever, we will be in control of our lives. We will be protected. We will have security. People who have experienced floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, and tsunamis know that control is an illusion. People who have experienced devastating illnesses know that in this world there is no security. There are times when only faith in God is enough.

One evening, when the director of a mission was delivering his evening evangelistic message to the usual crowd of still and sullen men with drooped heads, there was one man who looked up, came down the aisle to the altar, and knelt to pray, crying out for God to help him to change. The repentant drunk kept shouting, "Oh God! Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe!"

The director of the mission leaned over and said to the man, "Son, I think it would be better if you prayed, 'Make me like Jesus!'" The man looked up at the director with a quizzical expression on his face and asked, "Is he like Joe?" That's it, isn't it? That's what being a saint is all about. It's about living so much like Jesus that people don't know where he begins and we leave off. All Saints' Sunday is a day of celebration for those who have lived the life of faith before us and now surround God's throne in praise. But it is also an acknowledgment that all of us

are moving toward sainthood. We are establishing habits, fashioning a character, shaping a destiny. As such, our latter days may be more exciting and more profitable than our earlier days. Why? Because our lives are becoming a shining example of the life of righteousness and grace that we have found in him. That is an exciting and profitable thing to happen to a person at any age of life.

**Saints are persons who submit their will to God's will.**

"Blessed are the meek," said Jesus, "for they will inherit the earth." In the original Greek "meek" meant literally the "tamed" or the "broken" (as a wild horse is broken). A wild horse is of no use to anyone, but a tamed horse can carry even children. Meekness is a matter of submission to God's will. Submission is something most of us do not take to naturally.

There is the story of the first grader who appeared greatly upset when he came to the principal's office and requested to use the phone. "Can I help you with something?" the principal asked. The little boy explained, "Yesterday I forgot my sweater at school. This morning my mother told me not to come home without it. I can't find it anywhere. I want to call her and ask her where she wants me to go!"

For many of us life is one long battle for control. First with our parents, then with our teachers, then with our employers, and even with ourselves. That is the humbling effect of a bad habit. We discover we can't even control ourselves. We have only one hope - to yield to God's control. When we are able to do that, we can rest assured that God will take care of us.

William Hinson recalls the time when his children were younger and one child's pet died. Dr. Hinson says that he practiced "replacement therapy." When one pet died it was replaced by another pet. One time his youngest daughter, Cathy's cat died. Together they went to find another pet. Cathy selected a tiny peekapoo puppy. When they got home Dr. Hinson agreed to build a dog house for the new pet to live in. "The only kind of dog I knew very much about was a really big bird dog," he recalls, "so when I built the dog house, I built a very large house." In fact the house was too large for the small dog.

The size of the dog house scared the little peekapoo puppy. No matter what they did the little dog would not go near the dog house. They would put his food in there, and the dog would go hungry; they would put water in there, and the dog would not drink. "In exasperation," Dr. Hinson admits, "I would shove him in and hold my hands over the door; but the minute I would move, he would run out, unbelievably frightened." Nothing worked. The little dog would not go into his dog house no matter what they did to entice him.

In disgust, Dr. Hinson went inside, and sat down in the den while his daughter, Cathy, stood outside crying over her dad's impatience and the refusal of her puppy to cooperate. After a while, Cathy got down on her hands and knees and crawled into the dog house herself. When she crawled into it, something wonderful happened. That little puppy trotted right in beside her and stretched

out on the dog house floor. Before too long the dog was asleep. All the shadows now stood still for him, and all the fear was taken out of the darkness, because the one whom he loved and trusted had preceded him into that dark and frightening place. It no longer caused him fear.

There's a lesson here for us. We can surrender our wills to God's will knowing that God loves us. Wherever he leads us, he will be with us. We don't have to enter dark dog houses or any of life's dark circumstances alone. Saints trust in God and God alone. Saints submit their will to God's will.

**Saints are people who stand firm in the faith regardless.**

Jesus knew as he addressed his disciples on the mountain top that the day would come when they would be persecuted for believing in him. Jesus knew that living the kind of life that he outlined would be difficult. In his final beatitude Jesus tried to warn the disciples that the Christian life is sometimes very difficult.

"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account," Jesus told his disciples. When those things happen, and they are bound to happen at one time or another, Jesus says, "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven." All through the ages there have been saints who have suffered because of their Christian convictions. They took unpopular stands, but they remained strong in the faith. They did not waver in the face of adversity. Such persons are examples for us. They offer us hope. They endured and so can we.

When Margaret Helminski was seven, she received a gift from her grandmother. It was a tiny cross on a thin gold chain so fine that its weight was barely perceptible. "Never forget what this cross means," her grandmother said, as she fastened it carefully around Margaret's neck.

Over the years, Margaret says, that cross became a part of her. She could look at herself in the mirror and not even see it. As a graduate psychology student, she took a job tutoring at a school for emotionally disturbed children. Suddenly surrounded by children who expressed their displeasure by kicking, biting, and screaming, she was terrified, though determined not to let it show.

On her first night there, the head counselor said that three of the boys had asked to escort her to the dining hall. How would she handle it if all three decided to act out at once? She swallowed hard. She desperately needed this job, so she fought back the panic and walked with her them to the dining hall.

They passed through the cafeteria line as tantrums and fights erupted around them. Fortunately, none of her boys exhibited any kind of behavioral outburst. They made their way to a table in the center of the busy cafeteria, and the boys took their seats. Margaret picked up her fork and was about to take the first bite when she noticed that all three boys were staring at her.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Aren't you going to ask a blessing?" asked eight-year-old Peter.

"I didn't think I was supposed to," she responded. "This is a state school, isn't it?"

"Yes," said David, his blue eyes brimming, "but you wear a cross."

Her grandmother's words surged to the surface of her memory. "Never forget what this cross means," her grandmother said.

"We thought that meant something," said Roman, clearly disappointed.

"It does. Thank you for reminding me," Margaret said, as she bowed her head, no longer afraid. Margaret learned something about sainthood that day. Saints trust in God and God alone for their ultimate security. Saints submit their will to the will of God. Saints stand firm and witness to their faith regardless.

I've known a few saints in my time, haven't you? Some of them are now with God. They were not perfect people, but they fit these three criteria: "trusting God, submitting to God's will, standing firm in the faith. They blessed my life, and they blessed all who knew them. With gratitude to God, we honor their lives and the contribution they have made to who we are.

## Prayer

### Recognition of the Saints

We thank God for these who have gone to their eternal reward since last All Saint's Day:

Verne Allgood  
Jim Brooks  
Leatha Hembree  
Grace Shumpert

Mary Ellen Allgood  
Sandy Bryant  
Virgil Bennett

Willis Barre  
Dr. Rex Harper, Sr.  
Josephine Church Spinks

Others you name in your heart before God.

### Sources:

*Triumphant Living in Turbulent Times.* William H. Hinson. Nashville: Dimensions for Living, 1993, pp. 119-120.

*Everything You've Ever Heard Is Wrong.* Tony Campolo. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992, p. 73.