

Revival 4 “Called To Be Saints”

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: **Amen.**

Leader: Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful

All: **And kindle in them the fire of your love.**

Leader: Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created

All. **And You shall renew the face of the earth.**

Leader: Let us pray.

All: **O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.**

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 5:1-12a

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain,
and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him.
He began to teach them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the land.
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the clean of heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you
and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me.
Rejoice and be glad,
for your reward will be great in heaven.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

We call this Gospel reading from Matthew the Beatitudes. We find the word beautiful in the word beatitude because the beatitudes are Jesus' recipe for how to live a beautiful life. If we went to Galilee and saw the location where this happened, we would be tempted to call this the sermon on the hill rather than the mountain. The hyperbole however is meaningful because mountains are places where you cannot climb higher. It is the place where the earth touches heaven. It is from that place where Jesus teaches his followers the spirit of the Law of Moses rather than the letter. What does a beautiful life look like? For Jesus, people who are faithful, endure suffering with faith, are meek and merciful, clean of heart and peacemakers, and people who live the faith handed on to them in baptism are people who live beautiful lives. That is what we mean when we talk about saints. A saint is someone who lives a beautiful life. A saint is someone who, by the example of their lives, leads people closer to Christ. The Church gives us official saints whose example and intercession can help lead us to Christ and eternal life in heaven. But there are also saintly people in our lives who have passed on who also lead us to Christ and heaven.

You see, we all hope to be saints someday! When I think of this I think of Dorothy Day, the famous soup kitchen activist during the Great Depression. She responded one day to a reporter who called her a saint for all the good work she did. Dorothy Day responded, "Do not dismiss me that easily". Isn't that great? "Do not dismiss me that easily." Her point being: we are all called to be saints. That is why we come to Church, say our prayers, love God and love neighbor, and persevere in good works and charity. We all want to live beautiful lives. We all want to make the world a better place. My friends, do you know the word we use that defines someone who is in heaven? We call people who are in heaven "saints". So, who wants to be a saint, raise your hand! As followers of Jesus we are called to be saints.

When people get hung up on the Church's reverence for saints, I just tell them that the Saints are simply our baseball cards. I mentioned this on All Saints Day. You see, when I was a young kid, I would collect baseball cards of my favorite athletes hoping to be like them someday. We are not worshipping them when you do this. We are looking up to them. We do not worship saints as if they are God either. We are simply admiring them, asking for their intercession so they can lead us closer to Jesus in our own personal life. We do that all the time with relatives who have passed away. I still receive spiritual guidance from my grandparents and relatives who have passed away. Don't you? They are still with me in my prayers. They are my baseball cards. We are called to be similar examples to others, especially to the next generation.

There is a great book out there entitled "Saints Behaving Badly" by Thomas Craughwell. I mentioned last weekend that I would bring this up. It is a great book that tells the rest of the story regarding the lives of the saints. You see, a common theme you will hear from me over and over is that there have only been two people in the history of the world who were born without sin. Their names are Jesus and Mary. We are not them and neither are the saints. They all needed moments of conversion too. One of the chapters of this book tells the story of a man named Callixtus and it is a great story for those who wonder about their worthiness in the eyes of God. Have any of you seen the movie "Pirates of the Caribbean"? I am going to ask you to insert your favorite characters from the Pirates of the Caribbean into the story I am about to tell you. It would make for an entertaining movie.

The scene is late second century to early third century. Callixtus was a slave to a man named Carporphorus, a Christian who set up a bank for fellow Christians and early Church ministries during a time when Christianity was illegal. Because Carporphorus was impressed with Callixtus' accounting skills, Callixtus was soon in charge of this bank's investments. Callixtus however was not a very scrupulous person to say the least. With sticky fingers he purposefully mismanaged and embezzled the money for personal gain. He was of course caught and his misdeeds were exposed. Since the Christians in Rome were now very upset with him, not the least being Carporphorus, Callixtus' solution to the huge mess he put himself in was to simply panic and run away. I think of one of Jack Sparrow's escape scenes for some reason when I think about it. Callixtus fled as fast as he could to the ocean, jumped on board the first ship he saw because he didn't care where it went. Carporphorus of course followed after him, took the next boat and the chase scene ensued on the ocean, one ship following the other. When Callixtus saw that Carporphorus' boat was catching up, legend has it he again panicked, jumped into the water and started swimming as fast as he could towards land. It was probably a silly sight. Carporphorus sent a rowboat to have him fished out of the water, and Callixtus was finally caught and put in irons.

Once back in Rome, Carporphorus punished Callixtus by forcing him to operate a giant grist wheel day after day which was back breaking work, but a lot less severe than what could have happened to him. Callixtus eventually caught a break by agreeing to recover for the Christian community some of the lost money he mismanaged in return for being released from hard labor. Once Callixtus was free of his shackles, in his zeal to get things right, he of course managed to get into a lot of trouble again. He ended up starting a huge riot in a local synagogue trying to recover funds invested with the local Jewish community. The riot was so bad, Callixtus got himself arrested by Roman guards and sent to Fuscianus, the prefect of Rome. Fuscianus settled the matter in the usually brutal Roman way and ordered Callixtus scourged and banished to hard labor in the mines of Sardinia. This was essentially a death sentence as few slaves ever return from these mines.

Enter the mistress of Emperor Commodus into our story, a woman named Marcia. She and Commodus were featured in the movie *Gladiator*. This is the rest of the story. In addition to being the Emperor's lover she was also a Christian. How that math works, your guess is as good as mine, however Marcia was also a very courageous woman and used her influence to free Christian slaves from the fate of dying in the mines. To this end, she secretly asked Pope Victor I to give her a list of Christians to be freed. Pope Victor I gave her a long list but of course purposefully omitted Callixtus. When Marcia's representative arrived to free the Christian slaves, Callixtus fell at his feet and begged to be set free too even though he was not on the list. His pleas were heard and soon he was back in Rome. Once back, Callixtus understood that he had a lot of work to do to make up for his misdeeds. Time passed and Pope Victor saw sincere repentance at work in Callixtus' heart. So much so, that he permitted Callixtus to assist a priest named Zephyrinus who assigned work for priests and deacons in Rome for the pope. Years later, when Pope Victor died, Zephyrinus was so well regarded that he was in turn elected Pope. And because Callixtus had finally learned in life how to be a good and loyal servant, one of Zephyrinus' first acts as pope was to ordain Callixtus a deacon and put him in charge of a Christian cemetery on the Appian Way (a place where you can still visit to this very day).

The following is a quote from the book I have been referencing, “By the time Pope Zephyrinus (who would later be canonized as well) died in 217, Callixtus had become so well respected that the clergy and Christian laity of Rome elected the former slave, brawler, and embezzler pope...Callixtus’ brief five-year reign was marked by the virtue he had come to appreciate above all others: mercy.” I think we can all understand why “mercy” was at the heart of Callixtus’ papacy. He favored such radical concepts as finding ways for adulterers and notorious sinners to be rehabilitated and re-welcomed into the Catholic Church. Imagine that. And he received much opposition for this point of view, however his position for forgiveness and mercy in the life of the Church eventually won the day. In fact, I think it is fair to say our present day understanding of the Sacrament of Reconciliation can find its roots passing through the papacy of Saint Callixtus.

There is a lot more to his story than I have time. However, the reason why I share it with you is because the story of Saint Callixtus’ vocation as a deacon and later as a pope had little to do with his personal sense of feeling worthy. Follow? His vocation wasn’t about feeling worthy but rather about finally answering God’s call in his life. Do you see the difference? His story isn’t that different than the woman at the well in the Gospel of John, the good thief in the Gospel of Luke, or even St. Peter who knelt before the Lord and said, “Depart from me Lord for I am a sinful man”, remember that? Jesus’ response to Peter was “Follow me. I make you a fisher of men.” And Peter did just that. Peter felt unworthy too. The Lord called him anyway. Peter followed. And these people are saints, my friends. They are saints. They are our baseball cards. They are worthy to be celebrated because their colorful lives lead us to Jesus. We are called to be saints too. No matter what sense of worthiness we carry around in us, no matter what failings we brood over day after day, Jesus can transform our brokenness into an opportunity to lead others to heaven.

If there is one thing I want you to remember from this presentation tonight, it is this: The Saints inspire us. The Saints intercede for us. The Saints lead us. You know how this goes. The Saints “inspire us”. The Saints “intercede for us”. The Saints “lead us”. The Saints “inspire us”. The Saints “intercede for us”. The Saints “lead us”. The Saints “inspire us”. The Saints “intercede for us”. The Saints “lead us”. They lead us to Jesus my friends. They lead us to Jesus so that we can become saints too. Believe it. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end. Amen.

Guidance for the rest of the evening

At this time, I get to guide you through the rest of this evening. Like last time, we will begin with exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. It is an activity we call “adoration”. We believe Jesus is truly present in the Holy Eucharist and this is an opportunity to commune with Him.

Soon after we begin adoration, I will then invite our young people enrolled for our Revival small groups to quietly move in the direction of their group leaders. Notice that the color on your name tags correspond to the color of the flags of your group leaders. There is no expectation other than being present; however, you are welcome to participate. The questions for conversation are on the handout. There are no wrong answers. The rest of us will stay and pray for you.

The main reason for these circles however is just an opportunity to offer a prayer at the end for whatever it is you are asking of God right now. You will be invited to light a candle representing that prayer and to bring that candle to place on the altar, to Jesus. After you put the candle on the altar, in reverence consider genuflecting, making the sign of the cross, and then pray back at your seat for the others. I invite our group leaders to please be back here by 7:50. The evening will wrap up shortly thereafter with prayer and benediction. My heartfelt gratitude to all of you for being here tonight. Please stand.