

“After supper she got out her book and learned me about Moses and the Bulrushers, and I was in a sweat to find out all about him; but by and by she let it out that Moses had been dead a considerable long time; so then I didn’t care no more about him, because I don’t take no stock in dead people.” Thus ended Huckleberry Finn's association with Scripture, it being in his view a book about dead people. Of course, as Christians we believe that at least one of the characters in the Bible is still alive. It's Jesus if you were wondering.

Also unlike Twain's hero, we do take stock in dead people. Or at least, we strive to remember them; at least, the good things. Kind of the reverse of Mark Antony's observation from *Julius Caesar*: “The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones.” No, we tend to remember the good. And that is a good thing. While we wouldn't want to forget the mistakes of the past, and thus be prone to repeat them, it is generally not a bad thing to emphasize the good while forgiving the bad.

It seems a common trend these days to “dig up the dirt” on revered figures in an effort to show that such persons were not as good as they were thought to be. Thomas Jefferson slept with his slaves. Martin Luther King, John Kennedy had affairs. All mortals have feet of clay. Should the good then be interred with their bones? That being said, hero worship can be just as bad. As in so many aspects of this life, a middle way is required.

We acknowledge the mortal failings of the saints, whether they be found in the calendar of the Church or only in our families. But we also celebrate the good. The calendar saints are our agreed upon examples of godly living. Others, known only to a few, can still inspire us to want to be better than we are. That is why we have the Hallowtide, the Feasts of All Saints and of All Souls; to remind us to look to those who have gone before for inspiration and models of living the Christian life. Not worshiping, but remembering.

Allow me a moment to sort through some terminology. All Saints is on November 1 or the Sunday following. It is the only fixed feast in our calendar that we can transfer to a Sunday. All Souls is on November 2, and it cannot be transferred. Why two different feasts? It comes from our somewhat convoluted tradition. There has been some form of observance of All Saints since at least the Sixth Century. In Roman Catholic theology, a saint is a person who is recognized as having received the Beatific Vision. They are thought to be in the presence of God. Not all those who die go immediately to God's presence. Some spend time in Purgatory.

As Anglicans, we do not have a theology of Purgatory. At the same time, we do not presume to know exactly what does happen after physical death. We pray that God's will of the departed be done and leave it at that. So we pray for the dead but not in the same way that Roman Catholics do. We consider all members of the Body of Christ, the Church, to be saints. However, we also acknowledge that some departed are deserving of recognition more than others, thus our calendar of

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saints. For us, it has nothing to do with status in the afterlife, but general value to the Church Catholic as persons to be remembered. Saints make our calendar through act of General Convention, not proof of miraculous deeds. And even if on the calendar, we do not think them as being better than those not on the calendar just more widely applicable and deserving of recognition.

All Souls is for the departed known to a smaller audience as it were. Those close to us; those who have impacted our lives more directly. Since we do not have a very high hagiographic theology as do the Romans, the distinction between All Saints and All Souls is minor. We tend to conflate the two while retaining both. It probably also has a lot to do with All Saints always being available on a Sunday. All of this is to say that it is highly appropriate on this day to remember saints of all kinds, known and unknown.

But as we are looking back to those who have gone before, it is also appropriate to look forward, to recognize that we have the potential to be the saints remembered by those who come after us. Each of us is an example to one extent or another to others. Each one of us has someone who sees us and thinks "I want to be like them." Or thinks "I hope I am never like them." Everyone has value, even if it is as an example of what not to do. We should strive to avoid that last one, in case that wasn't clear.

The truth of the matter is, when we claim the name Christian, we become witnesses of Christ, both actively and passively. Even if we never speak a word of active evangelism, we still represent Christ and his Church to the world. By virtue of coming in those and taking a seat, of coming to this altar and receiving communion, we became the representation of Christ to the world. It behooves us to ask ourselves how well we are doing that. "The church is full of hypocrites." Do our lives support or refute that idea? "Christians are mean spirited and judgmental." How are we shaping that view? We bear an awesome responsibility being Christ in the world, whether we are aware of it or not. We need to be aware.

The good news is we don't have to change the world to change the world. It is not just the big, grandiose gestures that make a difference in the lives of people. We touch people's lives every day. Our call is to provide a touch that heals rather than harms. While I am generally suspicious of "bumper sticker theology," there is one bumper sticker I rather like. It is from the Diocese of Ohio. "Love God. Love your neighbor. Change the world." It says so much. Not the entirety of the Gospel to be sure. But loving God and loving our neighbor does change the world. Even better, it opens the door to transform the world. And that is rather the point. So let us sing a song of the saints of God. And, with God's help, let us mean to be one, too. In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*