

For the longest time I did not know the difference between All Saints' Day,
and All Souls' Day.

I have heard a variety of explanations;
some were helpful,
and others just confused me more!

This past Wednesday evening we celebrated a Solemn All Souls' Mass.

The point of All Souls' day is to pray for those friends and family members who have departed
this world for the next.

It is a time when we remember those who tried to live the Christian life when they were alive,
and now that they have died,
we continue to pray that they become more like Christ.

Today,
the day in which we observe All Saints' Day,
is the day when we remember those heroes of the faith
who have been stellar examples of what it means to live like a Christian.

The Saints are individuals who provide hope for us:
hope that the goal of becoming more like Christ is actually possible.
Not that we will BECOME CHRIST,
but rather more like him.

I think my tendency has been to think that we are all saints already;
but the more I think about it,
the more I don't believe this.

What I do believe,
is that we are all called to BE saints,
and we all have the potential to be saints,
because of what Christ did on the cross.

But some of us are not saints,
at least not yet.

Our epistle today illustrates this perfectly.

St. John reminds us that our heavenly Father loves us so much that he has chosen us through
adoption.

Unlike some of the earthly families that we were born into -
a family we had no choice over! -

God picked us.

And He did so not because we were perfect, good-lookin' kids,
like the Brady Bunch or The Banks children from Mary Poppins.

No,
in fact it is just the opposite.

We are the little orphan Annies,
the Oliver Twists if you will.

We aren't well spoken,
with perfectly combed hair...

and most certainly we did not know a salad fork from a dinner fork.

When God chose to adopt us,
we smelled,
had dirty faces,
head lice,
and probably spoke very poorly.
This is the case because we are all sinful by nature.
It was in this state that our Heavenly Father adopted us.
He does so with perfect love, grace and mercy.
He does not do so because of what we can offer him in return,
He does so simply because He wants to.
He takes pride and joy in us,
and He wants us to be great --
He wants us to be Saints.
But becoming a Saint takes time and work.
Becoming a Saint will not make God love us anymore than He already does,
because that is not possible.
He wants us to become Saints because that is what we were created for!
We were created in the image of our Heavenly father,
to be in relationship with him.
And not because He was bored and wanted some entertainment;
no,
He wants relationship with us so that He can show us how much He loves us.
God loves us because that is who He is:
LOVE.
So, how are we to become saints?
St. John gives us some clues.
First,
we need to remember that this will not happen overnight.
But,
it must be something we are aiming for.
I don't know about any of you,
but I always wanted to make my parents proud.
I tend to believe that is something inherent in all of us:
the desire to please those we love --
our spouses, parents, grandparents, favorite teachers --
and make them proud of us.
But this process of becoming saints takes time.
St. John says,
"Beloved,
we are God's children now;
what we will be has not yet been revealed."
We are all works in progress,
but it must be just that,

progress.

Some of us have been in the church for decades,
but yet we are no closer to becoming saints.
Instead we have sort of floundered around spiritually.
If you have been a Christian for a long time,
but you are not praying or reading the bible on a consistent basis,
how are you having relationship with God?
In order to become all that God longs for us,
we must spend time getting to know Him,
and following Him.

Think about your earthly relationships.

The way you get to know someone is to make time for them.

You talk frequently,
you learn about them etc...As we are spending time in prayer, bible study and coming to mass,
we will begin to see our lives changed,
and become more like Christ's.

Our epistle reading ends today by saying,
"And all who have this hope in him purify themselves,
just as he is pure."

I would like us to ask ourselves today,
are we purifying ourselves?

Are we doing those things that lead us to sainthood?

Our personal and corporate piety should be at the forefront of what we do here at St. Paul's.

I read a very interesting article this week in the Huffington Post.

The title of the article sums it up:

"It's the Spirituality, Stupid: Vital Congregations Cultivate Personal Piety."

The gist of the article is that the churches that pursue sainthood as a spiritual discipline,
have a greater impact on their communities.

The author points out that when a church is exercising its spiritual muscles,
through prayer, devotion, giving, confession etc...

they will feel a greater desire to look outward,
and have more success in helping the poor, oppressed and the needy.

As someone who used to be very politically active,
the thing I found most frustrating was that no matter how loud I yelled,
or how many petitions I signed,
people's lives were not changing.

I was not doing or saying anything that would aid them on their way to sainthood.

We can start all the outreach in the world,
clothing the homeless,
standing up for injustices, etc...

but if these do not stem from a place of personal and corporate piety --
loving God and worshipping him,

both as individuals and as a community when we come together on Sundays --
if our actions aren't first rooted in this,

then they will ultimately fail.

People want to know that their lives can have meaning;
and true meaning only comes from relationship with the God who created and loves you.

As we leave this place today,

I want us to challenge ourselves to be daring,

to be bold,

and to be something amazing.

Let us become the St. Sue's, St. Karl's and St. Pat's of the world,

that future generations will think of on their All Saint's Sundays,

for the glory of God our Father.

Amen.