

## Lives of the Saints

### All Saints, Year A

*preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, November 2, 2014*

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Welcome one and all to All Saints' Sunday, the Church's celebration of the men and women who, over the last two thousand years of our history, the Church has held up as particularly worthy of our notice and respect. In my library at home, I have a thick, antique copy of a devotional classic called, *Lives of the Saints*, which lists at great length the qualities that make all these men and women saintly. It enumerates the many miracles attributed to their intercession, or just to their mere presence. It chronicles the ways in which their lives should serve as models for our own. The book is meant to *inspire* Christian readers with the virtue and devotion of these people that the Church remembers and honors, especially today, with the title "Saint." I trot out this classic every now and then when I just want a little inspiration. But we use a different, newer, slimmer book, *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, nearly every week at our Wednesday noon service, to remember and celebrate many of these holy women and holy men. I enjoy reading about the accomplishments and the piety and the holiness of the Saints. But, you know me, I *also* find it interesting to think about the sort of qualities that *didn't* make it into *Lives of the Saints* or *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*.

We know for a fact, for example, that back in the fifth century, Saint Augustine was anything *but* a saint before God got a hold of him. We have his own words on it in his autobiography, *Confessions*, another ancient devotional classic. As Augustine grew into manhood, he tells us, he went all sorts of directions, both geographically and philosophically, none of which is worthy of any of us following. Along the way, Augustine went about as far from Christian thought as one might go, including a series of sexual indiscretions that would make a Kardashian blush. Among a great many other things, Saint Augustine is credited with writing that anyone who does not believe that children can and do sin, has never spent any time with a two-year-old. I suspect that he himself must have been a tornado of energy from an early age, vexing to no end his mother saintly mother, Monica. And yet today as we celebrate the Saints of God, we remember Saint Augustine, baptized later in life and eventually made a bishop of the Church, and we celebrate the tremendous contribution he made to our understanding of our relationship to God.

We don't have the same kind of autobiographical confession of the youthful indiscretions of Saint Francis in the thirteenth century. But if the sort of obstinate behavior which followed his conversion is any indication, he too must have been a real handful for his parents when he was younger. I mean, here's a guy who not only gave away all his stuff, but figured his rich dad didn't need so much stuff either, and had to be dragged into court to get him to stop giving away everyone *else's* stuff. In fact, those of you who remember the Zefferelli movie version might recall that, when confronted with his own need of material possessions, simply dropped his clothing in the middle of the town square, and walk away in the all-together. But today as we celebrate the Saints of God, we remember and celebrate a life that was so singularly devoted to following the example of Christ, that he was able to confront and challenge not just his father, but popes, and princes, and people like you and me, with the fact that we should *all* go and preach the Gospel, and that we should only use words if our actions just aren't enough.

We know practically *nothing* about the early life of Dame Julian of Norwich in the fifteenth century. But from the fact that she gained her insights into the mind of Christ from a series of mystic visions, we might be justified in speculating that she must have been – now, how should I say this respectfully – she must have been an *interesting* budding adolescent girl. It's not known, but I think it entirely possible that she gained her legendary penchant for solitary living, because her parents had to lock her in her room because she was just plain *weird*. And yet, still, as we celebrate the Saints of God, in the face of torment and trial, Julian's assertion, that "all will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of thing shall be well," has provided comfort and assurance to countless pilgrims on the journey in their own time of trouble, including, most especially, this one.

As we celebrate the Saints of God, I offer these little vignettes from the *real* lives of the Saints as a reminder that, as important as it is to look at all the sterling qualities with which the Saints were showered, it's just as important to remember that what made the Saints saintly was *not* that they were some sort of special human beings. What made these men and women saintly, was *not* that they were endowed by God at their birth with special powers of holiness. What made them saints was *not* so much that they possessed a level of devotion beyond what you or I possess. What made *these* women, and *these* men saintly, was that they took the energy and the resources and the virtues that made them who they were in the first place, and gave those things over to the use of the Kingdom of God, that they put *their* wills second to the will of Christ. What makes a Saint a saint is that they allowed God to use them in spectacular ways to do *his* work in *their* times. As I was reminded this week by a Parishioner, Scripture is full of characters who weren't even *nice*, much less noble, and yet they were used by God to bring God's people to a fuller, richer knowledge of his grace and his mercy and his love.

As we celebrate the Saints of God, let us remember that when we are tempted to look at each other's faults, each other's failures, and each other's foibles, to conclude that it is time to cut and run, that through the waters of baptism, God is working his purpose out in the life of *each* of us that are called children of God, because, John says, that is what we are. God is not finished with us yet – whether we're two, or four, or sixteen, or ninety-two. As we celebrate the Saints of God on this All Saints' Sunday, let's remember that the *same* redemption and call has been placed on each and every one of us who call ourselves Christians, each one of us who has been sealed as Christ's own forever. As we celebrate the Saints of God, today and *every* day, let us continue to conform our lives, our hearts, our *selves* to the love of Christ within us, and allow him to work in and through us – as St. Francis said, day, by day, by day. Amen.