

**J.j. St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 57th & Broadway, Sacramento, CA
All Saints Sunday-A, November 6, 2011 A.D.**

Psalm 116 12 What shall I render to the LORD
for all his benefits to me?
13 I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD,
14 I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people.
15 Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his saints.
16 O LORD, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the son of your maidservant.
You have loosed my bonds.
17 I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the LORD.
18 I will pay my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people,
19 in the courts of the house of the LORD,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.
Praise the LORD! [ESV]

HOW SAINTS BECOME SAINTS

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ.

The title of my homily on this All Saints Sunday is, "How Saints Become Saints."

So I ask you, How DO saints get to be saints?

We're talking about all those who have gone on before us, right? -- now they are saints, as Wm. Ward How called them in his well known hymn, "For all the saints who from their labors rest..."

But aren't we saints as well? The answer is, "Yes."

The saints above and the saints below make one 'communion of saints' as we confess in the Apostles' Creed, one great 'fellowship' of saints.

You see, the word 'saint' comes from the French as a translation of the Latin '*sanctus*' and it means, "A holy or godly person; especially one regenerated and sanctified." 'Holy' -- 'godly' -- 'sanctified' -- there's that word '*sanctus*' -- we are made saints! But how? That's the question before us today.

Part I. We Are Sinful Mortals

Point 1. And We are in Slavery to Fear.

It's November.

The end of the year is not far off -- the Church Year is drawing to a close -- the appointed Scriptures of these last few Sundays are all about 'last things.'

Death is in the air -- nature retreats -- people die.

One of my room-mates from prep school days in Concordia, MO died last week on Reformation Day.

He had become a nationally known Lutheran theologian and editor.

And my 101 yr. old patient at hospice died Wednesday, a man who spoke five languages; his favorite, his '*Mutter Sprache*', was German.

People we know die -- and that raises our fears: what is dying like? What comes next?

The author of Hebrews speaks of "... all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery." [Hebr. 2:15]

We are in 'bondage' to our fear of death.

Peter Marshall wrote: An old legend tells of a merchant in Bagdad who one day sent his servant to the market. Before very long, the servant came back, white and trembling, and in great agitation said to his master: "Down in the market place I was jostled by a woman in the crowd, and when I turned around I saw that it was Death that jostled me. She looked at me and made a threatening

gesture. Master please lend me your horse, for I must hasten away to avoid her. I will ride to Samarra and there I will hide, and Death will not find me.”

The merchant lent him his horse and the servant galloped away in great haste. Later the merchant went down to the market place and saw Death standing in the crowd. He went over to her and asked, “Why did you frighten my servant this morning? Why did you make a threatening gesture?”

“That was not a threatening gesture,” Death said. “It was only a start of surprise. I was astonished to see him in Bagdad, for I have an appointment with him tonight in Samarra.

[For All the Saints, Book I, p.937f. -- Peter Marshall 1902-1949]

Each of us has an appointment in Samarra.

Point 2. We Fear Death because our Faith is either Weak or Misplaced

We know the promises -- God promises us salvation on the other side.

-- Eternal life is God’s gift to those who trust in His Son.

But we don’t fully trust the promises -- we still want to lean on our own good works.

This is the occupational hazard of the Christian -- believing we can save ourselves -- not, “All glory be to God,” but “All glory be to man!”

Here’s a Sunday School story to illustrate this:

How to get to Heaven

I was testing the children in my Sunday School class to see if they understood the concept of getting to Heaven. I asked them, "If I sold my house and my car and had a big garage sale and gave all my money to the church, would that get me into Heaven?"

"No!" the children answered.

"If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me into Heaven?"

Again, the answer was, "No!"

By now I was starting to smile. Hey, this was fun! "Well, then, if I was kind to animals and gave candy to all the children, and loved my husband, would that get me into Heaven?", I asked them again.

Again, they all answered, "No!"

I was just bursting with pride for them. "Well," I continued, "then how can I get into Heaven?" A five-year-old boy shouted out, "You gotta be dead."

Well, the Sunday School kids had it right -- you don’t get to heaven by doing good.

St. Paul wrote to the church in Galatia that we are “...justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.” [Gal. 2:16b]

We need to ask ourselves if our trust is totally in Christ for the gift of eternal life.

Point 3. Our Fear is Really Fear of Judgement

St. Paul wrote both to the church at Rome and to the church at Corinth, “For we must all appear before the **judgment** seat of Christ; ...”[2 Cor. 5:10]

In our Psalm text today, the Psalmist may be reflecting that fear of judgement:

“The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;

I suffered distress and anguish. [Ps. 116:3]

In today’s psalm which we chanted earlier, we had this line:

I sought the LORD and he /answered me //and delivered me out of /all my terror. [Ps. 34:4]

Could that terror have anything to do with being judged by a holy God?

We know in our hearts that an accounting is coming -- we know we are sinful mortals.

So here is our diagnosis from part one:

We are in Slavery to Fear.

We Fear Death because our Faith is either Weak or Misplaced.

Our Fear is Really Fear of Judgement.

Thanks be to God that there is a

Part II. We Are Declared to Be Saints

Point 1. We Are Precious to God -- the Cross is our Proof

We read in our text, v. 15, Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. [Ps. 116]

And in Psalm 72, Solomon speaks of how God delivers the weak and the needy --

“...and precious is their blood in his sight. [14b]

“Precious!” That’s what we are to God. “Precious saints” is what He calls us.

The root word for precious in Hebrew is **קָרִי** (Yah-Car) -- its original meaning is “to

be heavy” and it refers to gold and jewels and precious stones used for building. Our God chooses to look upon us as if we were golden!
We are as jewels in His eyes.
That is proven by the cross -- God kept his promises made through his prophets.

The Gospel pericopes at this end of the church year remind us, e.g., that we are invited to the Marriage of the Bridegroom, who is none other than Jesus Christ. E.g., when dividing the sheep from the goats, the sheep are invited to “Come, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you.”

Who prepared that Kingdom for us? Paul writes to the Romans, “It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God.” [Rm. 8:34]

And so we are called “saints;” declared to be “saints,” because of the cross.

St. Paul writes: “To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be **saints**: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” [Rm. 1:7]

Point 2. But It Is by Faith that We Endure

Vincent Van Gogh, the 19th C. artist, once studied for the priesthood.

Here is a part of one of the few sermons of his still in existence:

Our life is a pilgrim's progress. I once saw a very beautiful picture: it was a landscape at evening. In the distance on the right hand side a row of hills appeared blue in the evening mist. Above those hills the splendor of the sunset, the grey clouds with their linings of silver and gold and purple. The landscape is a plain or heath covered with grass and its yellow leaves, for it was in autumn. Through the landscape a road leads to a high mountain far, far away. On the top of that mountain is a city whereon the setting sun casts a glory. On the road walks a pilgrim, staff in hand. He has been walking for a good long while already, and he is very tired. And now he meets a woman, or figure in black, that makes one think of St. Paul's word: "As being sorrowful yet always rejoicing." That Angel of God has been placed there to encourage the pilgrims and to answer their questions, and the pilgrim asks her: "Does the road go uphill then all the way?"

And the answer is: "Yes to the very end."

And he asks again: "And will the journey take all day long?"

And the answer is: "From morn till night my friend."

*[One of the few surviving sermons he preached while studying for the ministry]
The Complete Letters of Vincent Van Gogh (1853 - 1890)*

Pilgrims, Saints: we are justified by grace through faith in Christ, and it is only by keeping the faith that we are able to endure the journey.

So, Point 3, We Need to Stay in Touch with Our God

That's why we come here together to partake of the Food for the Journey, The Lord's Supper.

With the psalmist in Psalm 116 we say:

12 "What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me?"

13 I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD,...."

Here at the Table we receive forgiveness, life and salvation.

Here in this place we hear the Word and keep in touch with our God.

In Conclusion: How do saints become saints?

Our diagnosis is that we are terminal cases -- all mortals die -- and we all fear death.

But our prognosis is good: **1. We Are Precious to God; the cross is our proof.**

2. It Is Only by Faith that We Endure; 3. So We Need to Stay in Touch with Our God.

Psalm 116 16 O LORD, ... You have loosed my bonds.

17 I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call upon [your] name

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

S.D.g. -- The Rev. Dr. Donald Schedler, Ph.D., Chaplain, Snowline Hospice, Diamond Springs, CA.

(Rockwell 11; Georgia 10)