

“Holding out for a Hero”

- My favorite rendition of that song is sung by Jennifer Saunders in Shrek 2, the movie
 - Her character, the Fairy Godmother, sings this song at the climax of the movie, where the real hero is revealed, Shrek of course
 - And Prince Charming is exposed as the villain, and his deceit laid bare
 - It was one of my favorite movies before I had a kid, and since then all the more
 - If you have not seen Shrek or its sequels, you should add it to your list
 - The unlikely hero who turns out to be a green ogre with bad hygiene, rather than the handsome Prince Charming everyone sort of expects
 - It is a great reversal that brings excellent one liners throughout the show
 - In addition to making a great plot for a funny movie
 - I think these movies are asking a larger question, and one that is particularly relevant for us today
 - “What makes a hero?” What is it that makes someone worth admiring?
 - Because it is not what you often expect it to be- sometimes the hero turns out to be the last person you would ever expect
 - A green ogre perhaps
 - It’s a reversal that I think all Christians should find familiar, perhaps like we have heard it before
 - In fact, I think Jesus even talks about it in our gospel this morning, but more on that later
- What got me thinking about heroes, and then of course the song from Shrek, is that today is All Saints Day
 - The day the church celebrates its heroes of the faith
 - All Saints is a major feast in the church- it does not get any bigger than this according to our prayerbook
 - It’s right up there with the other principal feasts like Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost

- It has a long history in the church, dating officially dating back to the early ninth century in Ireland
- But with roots all the way back to the year 270AD, with the ancient church celebrating and remembering those who had died in the faith¹
 - Especially those with heroic deaths and famous deeds
- Within a hundred years or so, another holiday was added to the church calendar on the day before All Saints
- It was called All Soul's, or All Hallow's, and celebrated all the faithful departed who while may not be famous
- Still led exemplary lives and who made impacts upon local communities
- Of course, the night before All Hallow's is All Hallow's eve, or Halloween
- Together these three holidays create the church's way of encountering death, an early version of Dr. Kubler-Ross's stages of grief I think²
- On Halloween, we mock death, deny its impact, and even try to trick or negotiate with it
- Then on All Soul's, we feel the sting, the anger and denial, of losing someone we love, and even contemplating our own mortality
- And finally All Saint's Day, celebrating the saints who have gone before
- And perhaps accepting death, and choosing to live a life modeled by these heroes of the faith
- Knowing that in God death is not hopeless, nor the end, but a transition.
- We are fortunate enough here at St. Michael's to get to participate in all three ancient traditions
- We had fun and dressed up in our costumes this past Thursday night- in spite of the weather!
- This morning we celebrate the Saints
- And tonight I want to invite you to All Soul's requiem, a place to sit, pray, and grieved remember those whom we love but see no longer
- It's important, I think, to have these opportunities
 - And in particular this morning as we remember the big name heroes of the Christian Faith- I think we need heroes
 - I recently ran across an article by Peter Gibbon, who was a research associate at Harvard University, entitled "The End of Admiration"³

¹ Lesser Feasts and Fasts p. 436

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kübler-Ross_model

³ <https://imprimis.hillsdale.edu/the-end-of-admiration-the-media-and-the-loss-of-heroes/>

- This article, and Gibbons other writings, bring up the point that we in our society today do not have many heroes anymore
- Peter Gibbon attributes this to our rise in cynicism encouraged by our journalists who are only out to sensationalize
- And their preference for celebrity worship at the expense of idealism and heroism
- That our constant diet of negative news creates the impression that decay is everywhere and nothing is sacred
- That everyone has a dark side, and somehow that imperfection shadows any good a person might have done
- Combine that with instant and overwhelming amounts of information, and soon you can conclude that there are no heroes worth looking up to
- It doesn't take much to see what he is talking about
- From politicians, to teachers and preachers, it's only worth reporting if it's sensational
- Any positive talk about the founding fathers seems to be quickly connected to the bad things they also did.
- Here's another example-
- I'll never forget when Mother Teresa died, a long time ago now in 1997
- This woman who had dedicated her life to serving the poorest of the poor in Calcutta
- Who had amazingly convinced the patriarchy to support her work, and who had touched many lives
- Yet after she died, I remember reading about how while she had done all of these great things
- Many felt the need to point out her imperfections as well
- Some criticized her for being too controlling, or for not doing enough to help the poor⁴
- It was almost as if we felt the need, the compulsion, to tear her down
- We do not have many heroes anymore
- And that's a problem, because it is in our heroes that we teach our ideals and our values
- We need heroes
- If then we are looking for heroes on this All Saints morning, we must then ask, what makes a hero?

⁴ <http://moralcompassblog.com/2013/03/06/mother-teresa-perhaps-not-so-holy/>

- What it is that makes someone worth imitating and remembering through the ages?
- Our first guess is usually the strong, the powerful, those that can move mountains and save the day
- I remember seeing several good costumes on Wednesday night of Captain America, Darth Vader, and even Superman
- I saw a great Moana
- When we think of heroes, we tend to think of the strong and powerful people and characters who accomplish amazing feats
- But much like for our favorite green ogre Shrek, for Christians these are not the attributes that make a hero
- Jesus gives us another picture of what it means to be a hero of the faith and one of his disciples
- Jesus says here in Luke it is the poor, the hungry, and those who weep who will be blessed
- Those who are persecuted and hated, as were the prophets
- In Matthew's version of this passage, Jesus says that it is the meek, rather than those who exert power over others
- The merciful, not those who run after revenge and retaliation
- The peacemakers, rather than those who fight and profit from it
- These are the real heroes, the ones we are to imitate
- We need heroes like St. Francis of Assisi
 - We heard about him recently at the blessing of the animals
 - How he, after growing up in a life of luxury, gave it all up and embraced poverty and served the lepers and the poor
 - He tried to live out the Gospel as literally as he possibly good, relying on God for everything
 - We have saints like St. Lucy, who lived around 300 AD
 - She was killed for her faith and her desire to devote herself to God, rather than get married
 - St. Martin of Tours, a soldier in uniform who cut his military cloak in half to share with a beggar⁵
 - And St. Teresa of Avila, who faced persecution and lawsuits in the 1500s all because she wanted to found a Convent
 - One based on a simple life of prayer

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_of_Tours#Legend_of_Martin.27s_cloak

- She believed that the most powerful and acceptable prayer was that prayer that leads to action⁶
- She believe good effects were better than pious sensations that only made a person feel good
- And even St. Vincent, commemorated right here in this altar with a relic
- Believed so strongly in the good news of Jesus Christ, he refused to burn Scripture
- His outspoken manner angered the governor and he was tortured and killed for his faith.
- We need these heroes and many more to challenge us
 - We need ideals to live up to, examples of how to live good lives and die good deaths
 - Perhaps All Saints Day can helps us reclaim some of our heroes of the faith
 - No, of course the saints were not perfect. No one is.
 - From St. Francis, to Augustine, to Martin Luther King-
 - They fought the same temptations and battles you and I face.
 - Sometimes they got it right, and sometimes they did not.
 - But their lives and witness are still powerful examples for us today
 - In fact, I think their imperfections and mistakes make them all the more relevant
 - That article I mentioned before, by Peter Gibbons, concludes like this:
 - “We need to be honest and realistic without losing our capacity for admiration—and to be able to embrace complexity without losing our faith in the heroic.”⁷
 - And perhaps as we go through this triduum of services this week, we can model our lives after these great heroes of the faith
 - Perhaps they can even challenge us in the time we have on this earth to become someone worth imitating
 - We are baptizing two new members into the church today- they will need heroes, and example in word and deed of what it means to be Christian
 - Perhaps this can be our call- our bat signal- to be heroes, even though we will not be perfect
 - Even though we may be mocked, or dragged through the mud

⁶ http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=208

⁷ <https://imprimis.hillsdale.edu/the-end-of-admiration-the-media-and-the-loss-of-heroes/>

- Even though in some places it may even lead to persecution
- Even though we might be the most unexpected hero to have ever be seen
- Maybe this is our call to be saints- to be Christians worth imitating.

Amen.