

November 6, 2011  
All Saints' Sunday  
St. Martin's Church  
The Rev. Newell Graham

Today we observe All Saints' Day. It is one of my favorite days of observance. Imagine this: You are asked to draw a picture of a saint. After protesting that you're no artist and you can't draw, think about who you would draw if you could.

There was a time in my life when there would have been no question about my drawing, my personal depiction of a saint. I know exactly how it would look. "My saint" would have been kneeling in prayer and not with knees on an upholstered cushion, but on a stone cold floor. The facial attitude would have been one of absolute contentment and focus. In other words, my saint would be seen enjoying kneeling on a stone floor for extended periods of time, in fervent prayer. My saint would be looking forward to the next prayer period.

As I think about this, my knees begin to hurt! Nevertheless, that would have been the picture of a saint I would have wanted to draw. How about you? What would your picture of a saint look like? Has your idea of a saint evolved and changed? My notion of a saint has changed radically! I think of saints differently now.

I read recently about a man who visited a monastery during a time in his life of real spiritual hunger and searching. When, finally, he was able to sit down with one of the monks, something very surprising happened: after he and the monk had been talking only a short time, the monk – Father Joachim – clapped his hands as if he were shooing away a horse fly and said, "Return to the world; in this day and age the world is the true monastery. That is where you will become a saint."

The saints we celebrate are not flawless paragons of virtue in refuge behind monastery and convent walls, kneeling on stone floors. No, on All Saints' Day we celebrate the saints in our midst, in the world around us. In the book "The Devil's Dictionary" there's this definition of a saint: "A dead sinner; revised and edited". Well, the part about being a "sinner" is certainly accurate. All of us are sinners. No amount of revising or editing can change our sinfulness!

A saint is simply a believer in Christ. Belief in Christ does not make us perfect; we continue to be sinners as long as we live, but we are no longer hopelessly sinful. Now all the power of Christ is working in us, all the time causing us each day to acknowledge our sins and sincerely repent. In that repentance we are able to enjoy another one of those fresh starts that God never tires of giving.

The communion of saints is the fellowship of those who are continually receiving the life-giving influence of Christ; all of those countless people who have, and who are, responding to the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, without recognition or fanfare. These are the focal points for our observance of All Saints'.

I ran across this and I want to share it with you. Whom do we remember and focus on today, on All Saints? The divorced hairdresser struggling to support her children, the elementary school principal fighting drugs in the inner city – or just as likely the elementary school principal fighting drugs in the suburbs, the assembly worker dazed in redundancy, the neurosurgeon cutting away a tumor, the truck driver listening to Johnny Cash, rolling down I-75, and the hospice volunteer mopping the brow of an emaciated AIDS patient – any of these people, if they have turned to God, could be saints. All of us can be saints. What All Saints' Day should remind us is that salvation is only of the Lord, and that only in Him and through Him and by Him can we truly live, find meaning, and experience hope. In Him we can become saints.

Martin Luther said that we are sinners and saints at the same time. In our limited vision, we have a difficult time seeing and accepting this paradox, but in God's economy there seems to be no problem at all. God calls us as we are: flawed and sinful people, and gathers us up into a gallery of saints who have preceded us. We are no better or worse than they were. Our "piety" and "goodness" seem not to be an issue where God is concerned. God is just interested in our desire to be in relationship with Him.

And, so, Happy All Saints', my dear brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Are there really saints among us? Probably! What I know for certain is that there is an eternal opportunity for us to become saints!

They lived not only in ages past,  
There are hundreds of thousands still.  
The world is bright with joyous saints  
Who love to do Jesus' will.  
You can meet them in school,  
Or in lanes, or at sea  
In church or in trains, in shops or at tea  
For the saints of God are just folk like me,  
And I mean to be one too!