

November 4, 2012
All Saints Sunday
Text: Rev. 7:9-17
Theme: "The Feeble Struggle"

One of my favorite hymns is "For All the Saints." And of the 8 verses my favorite is verse 4.

Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine! We feebly struggle, they in glory shine; Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine.

We feebly struggle. They in Glory shine. That is why we celebrate today. Our best attempts at life are feeble and the sooner we accept that, the happier we are. Some people are offended by our corporate confession where we call ourselves "poor, miserable sinners." If that offends you then you need to take a closer look at the Law. If it crushes your self-esteem, good. We're not supposed to esteem ourselves, but rather we esteem Christ who lives in us. The problem we have in this world is not too little self-esteem but too much!

If we are focused on who Christ has made us, we have no time for whining about who we are not. What's more, if we are focused on who Christ has made us, we have a lifetime of exploration and experimentation before us because we have more gifts and more potential than we will ever have time to use. So the classic definition of "low self-esteem" is inconsistent with and really quite impossible for the Christian.

Nor do we have any need to look down in judgment on anyone because we are no better. We might hide our secret evil thoughts in our dirty little hearts and mumble our hurtful words under our breath but we are no better than the rank sinner upon whom we are casting judgment. God sees e-v-e-r-y-t-h-i-n-g! that is why we confess that we are poor miserable sinners. We begin worship with a reality check of why we are here again this week. We, the miraculous creation of God, washed in Baptismal water and fed with the very body and blood of Christ have once again soiled the temple. We have spiritually defecated all over God's holy temple. So, just as you will all be doing in the next couple of weeks as you clean your homes for Thanksgiving, before worship, we clean up our temple and hear the cleansing words of Jesus through the pastor, "I forgive you all your sins."

This is life for us on this earth. We live a cycle of messing up the temple and having the Lord clean it up over and over again until the day we are ushered into paradise. We listen, in the Gospel, to our Lord proclaim the Beatitudes and we have to listen carefully. Don't listen with your American ears that hear everything as though you can roll up your sleeves and do it yourself. Listen with your Christian ears that understand that you are incapable of anything good without God acting through you – poor – miserable – sinner.

We are the poor in spirit. We are those that mourn. We are the meek. We are the hungry. Jesus is not mandating rules to live by but describing our lives on earth and promising that it will get better. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.

We hear Jesus. We want to believe him. But it just seems like the meek get walked on and the hungry have to fend for themselves and no one cares when we mourn. It is always better for us, easier for us to believe, when we have a tangible example and that is why the Lord gives us the saints. God provides us with examples of people who have walked the same paths we walk. I can look to my own personal collection of saints and find strength and support in my walk. When I feel underappreciated in life, I can look to Mother Theresa who taught me that the Christian life is fulfilled not in what others do for you but in what you are able to do for others. When I worry about American politics and what will become of the Church, I can look to Dietrich Bonhoeffer who faced Hitler's execution squad with a sanctified smile, knowing with all his heart that Jesus was Lord and Adolph Hitler would be undone. When I become frustrated over how difficult it is in this world to witness to our faith in Jesus Christ, I can look to Margaret Sylvester, one of my former parishioners, who bravely lived with ovarian cancer for 10 years and

taught hundreds, maybe thousands what the joy of Christianity looked like without ever saying a word about religion.

They all feebly struggled, just like Jesus said they would in the beatitudes, but Christ filled them with his word, washed them in Baptismal water and fed them with his own body and blood and they made it as we will make it. He works through us, and he makes all his poor miserable sinners into saints and we shine in a darkened world. This is the feeble struggle. It is what it is in a sinful world and while there will be better times and more difficult times, life in this world is always the feeble struggle. The reward comes at the end when we hear the words,

“Well done, good and faithful servant.”

But, lo, there breaks a yet more glorious day:

The saints triumphant rise in bright array;

The King of Glory passes on His way.

Alleluia! Alleluia!