

Mark 12:28-34
November 4, 2018

“All Saints Day”

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Today we celebrate All Saints Sunday at Emanuel. A part of our worship includes a reading of the names, lighting of a candle, and ringing a chime in memory of those from our congregation who have died in the last 12 months. This year we have added the use of our Video technology as part of this ritual.

As we gather, I will remember Kathy’s relentless willingness to help anyone who needed something. I will remember Priscilla’s tireless dedication to decorating our church and to numerous organizations in the Hales Corners Community. I will remember Gordy’s wonderful, and thought-provoking questions which he liked to pose to me at the door after worship. I will remember Ron’s side-splitting sense of humor. I will remember Margie’s strong, yet humble and gracious presence. I will remember Sandy’s amazing ability to love each person just the way they are. Now born into eternal life, these loved ones leave a powerful imprint on us, they have touched our lives, and for their gift we are ever thankful to God.

It’s funny when we think of the word saint, we often picture devout persons bowed in prayer day and night, or people of perfect character, we conjure up images of those who constantly practice self-giving expecting nothing in return. We assume the more serious they are in life, the higher their holiness. But did you know some of the Saints were actually, sort of, hilarious. Here are a couple examples I found.

Saint Philip Nero once showed up to the house of a parishioners with half of his beard shaved off. In addition, he often took the liberty of adding humor to his sermons. Once, when the Bishop attended Philip’s congregation, Philip committed every possible error in pronunciation during his sermon. The crowd wasn’t sure if they should laugh or remain silent, but Philip surely enjoyed a good laugh.

Saint John Bosco was a restless servant of God. He had a zeal for teaching youth that led him to master many unusual skills for a Priest such as juggling, acrobatics, and magic tricks. His reputation grew among the youth in Turin, Italy; where he taught them, lived with them, and helped them lead happier, more faithful lives. His methods were a bit unorthodox, which led a few of his fellow priests to recommend John to the insane asylum.

But, when the priests came for him with horse and carriage, John Bosco knew of their intentions. He politely waited as the two priests entered the carriage. When it was his turn to step up, he slammed the door, slapped the horse and yelled to the carriage driver, “To the asylum! They’re expecting You!”

This church, Emanuel, grows out of the German Evangelical tradition of the United Church of Christ. In that tradition All Saints day was an opportunity to observe “totenfest,” a german word meaning “Festival of the dead.” Other cultures are doing similar celebrations this time of as you may see from our Mexican neighbors who are celebrating Dia de los Muertos.

Totenfest, in the German Evangelical church, was established in 1816 by Prussian Emperor Frederick William III as a day to remember that nation's soldiers who had died in the Prussian War which had just ended. It was quickly expanded as a day to also remember church members who had died over the previous year.

In many parts of Germany, Totenfest is the day families visit the graves of loved ones to clean off the summer flowers and cover the graves with evergreen boughs for the winter.

This talk about Saints got me thinking. Since the United Church of Christ doesn't have a specific process for the canonization of saints. What characteristics make up a saint? I tried this a few years ago, but this year I again challenged myself with the question, "How do we think of saints?"

Here's my list, what would be on yours? A Saint . . .

Thinks about others.

Cares about people they don't know, don't like, and don't agree with.

Considers the needs of the poor, the outcast, the forgotten, the oppressed and the sick,

Forgives, and accepts forgiveness.

Solves problems by considering the Common good of all.

Honors grieving times in their own life and the lives of others.

Can sit comfortably in silence with others, and can pray with others if requested.

Keeps appropriate confidences

Faces tragedy while watching for goodness and beauty to grow from it.

prays and works to make the world more loving and peaceful

Loves God

Has joy reflected in their face.

Is often ready with a compliment.

Celebrates diversity in many forms.

Uses Humor tastefully

Communicates challenging news with compassion and understanding.

Is vulnerable, which opens them to lots of pain, but also, often leads to mountains of joy.

Seeks to learn what others need instead of assuming they know what someone else needs.

Practices Extravagant Generosity.

The Gospel of Mark says it better: The first is, "...you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these."
Amen