



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

Sunday, November 4th, 2012 Trinity XXII
Commemorating All Saints

The passage selected for the sermon this morning is taken from the Gospel:
"Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven."
St. Matthew 5:6

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. *AMEN* ✠**

Poor in Spirit is a peculiar term that gets misused by people with political or social agendas. The best way to understand the term isn't as an indicator of quantity, but of awareness of dependency. Someone in poor health needs the help of doctors and caregivers. Someone truly poor in wealth, not only has little, but has so little that they could not survive without the grace and resources of a community, whether civil, familial or religious. Similarly, to be "poor in Spirit" is an acknowledgement of our inability to lift ourselves above our sinfulness without the grace of God, and the help of a community of loving, support.

When St Paul came to Rome, he found they had an All Gods Shrine on Mars Hill. That sort of worship is based on fear, fear that some otherworldly power will be offended by our negligence, and wreak havoc in our lives. All Saints Day is very different. It is not a fearful attempt to placate forgotten saints, nor is it a catch all day for acknowledged minor saints that don't deserve a dedicated feast day. Instead, I want to invite you to celebrate an All Saints Day that is intimate, and anticipatory. All Saints Day is a day to remember the Saints that have been in our lives, who have inspired us, who have prayed for us, who have consoled us. Today is a

day to remember those who loved us, simply because they were loved themselves by Christ.

Who are the Saints we know that personally, those whose lives, or perhaps even, who deaths inspire the passion for us to persevere until we can be re-united with them. Children, who died in innocence, filled with love. Parents, who sacrificed every day to care for us and inspire us. Grandparents who were our emotional and spiritual shelter and who gave us confidence in our faith and prayers. Friends who comforted us in distress, celebrated with us in times of joy, made them vulnerable to us.

I just came from a funeral for a the husband of one of Carolyn's childhood friends. I had never met the man, and yet as one after another of the hundred and fifty people that came to celebrate his life talked about this man, the comment that was repeated by all was that this man was in heaven. They knew he was in heaven because he had made their lives more heavenly here in this world with his kindness, and cheerfulness, his witness of Christ and love for his family and community. I did not know this man, but I left that church knowing that man was a saint.

In my own life, my grandmother, who prayed for us all constantly, had one of those

beautiful deaths we all dream about. She was surrounded by family, she had all her faculties, and as the time grew closer for her to leave, she was visited by loved ones who had gone before her, and finally was surrounded by angels. Her words to us, please don't be sad, I am going to a beautiful place and I am surrounded by love. In your time, you will join me there and we will be happy in the love of Christ forever. I don't think or hope that she is in heaven. I know she is in heaven, because I saw her go there.

Years later, while teaching school, I would be asked by teenagers how I knew there was a loving God. I could answer them that the certainty didn't come from intellect, or study of arcane text, or by some arcane ritual. I knew that there was a loving God, because I had been a witness when he brought my grandmother with Him to heaven. As a priest, I have had the privilege to see that kind of profound and beautiful death many times, and anyone who has shared that experience can tell you that there is no doubt about the destination of those souls, the Love that was shown them by God, the Love they then shared with us, giving us courage for our own transformation.

Every one of you have had the experience of knowing someone in your life is a saint. Today is a day to remember them, to pray with them, to be hopeful of our reunion with them.

Why do we remember them. Because our passion to be with them overcomes our selfishness, helping us to persevere in charity and faith just to be with them again. They are like magnets, ever drawing us closer to them, not only in destination, but in character. We are more saintly because we yearn, we ache, to be with them forever.

Why do we pray with them. Because they are alive and, as we pray in the prayers for the State of Christ's Church, they are growing in their own faith and service to God. Their salvation is no longer at risk, but they are still persons, and as persons they grow into a deeper and more beautiful relationship to God, and to us, every day. We pray with them because they remember us, and they remember those that are important to us, those we pray will overcome adversity and fear and pain and doubt. They pray with us for those we love.

We hope to be with them, because we covet their saintly love, and we hope to love them as saints. This is very important. We know because we have witness of the life Jesus showed us after His Resurrection, and because He promised us the same transformation, that we will be able to live as saints in perfected bodies. We fail to appreciate what that means. It is NOT a state of health, or age, or agility. Certainly we know, as St Paul tells us today, that perfected bodies will no longer suffer. That is a consolation for those we saw suffer in this life, and a hope for our own suffering as well. But we are Not just transformed bodies when we get to heaven, We are transformed PERSONS, Persons whose life are defined by our love for God and for each other. As transformed and perfected persons, we will love each other, our fellow saints, with the perfect love God has for us. We will not be disappointed, or hurt, or ignored, or fearful in our saintly love. We will be loved by our fellow saints the way we had always hoped to be loved. More importantly, we will be able to give our love in a saintly way. We won't disappoint in our selfishness, in our absence, in our fearful and weak willed being. We will be able to love the people we will join the way we had always hoped to love them.

This is a hope and a day to celebrate with passion. That we, by the grace of God, are admitted to the place we were made to inhabit, to the life we were created to enjoy, to the Love we have craved every day of our lives, to be in the Communion of Saints. To be at the banquet, at our wedding banquet, basking in the abundance and love of our Bridegroom, locked hand in hand with those we have loved, arrayed in glistening robes and crying out in praise and joy, Glory be to God, hallelujah. We are home.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

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