



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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The Commemoration of the Feast of all Saints
Being the Twenty Third Sunday after Trinity, November 3rd, 2013

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

TODAY is the Feast of All Saints and the lessons proper for today are readings from the Book of Revelations and St. Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount – Jesus' long explanation of the vast gap that exists between what we think of as holy and God's actual standards of holiness.

These are all excellent instructions in what it takes to achieve sainthood. But, as it happens, today is also the 23rd Sunday After Trinity. And one of the propers appointed for the day contains what I believe to be the most fundamental lessons to be learned about saintliness.

But before I get into that it is important to point that today isn't simply a celebration of the great saints – the big enchiladas like St Benedict, St Francis of Assisi, St. Edward the Confessor and so forth. The saints we are celebrating today are the little saints – people known only to God and, maybe, a few others.

I guess we all have a personal list of saints. Mine include Mrs. White, the schoolteacher who taught our whole village to read write and figure; Tom Carvely, the local Methodist minister whose kindness, decency and skill with a cricket bat earned affection

respect that extended way beyond his immediate flock; Miss Leaper, a Sunday school teacher whose talent for story-telling brought the Bible to life.

But, actually, all of us here in church are saints, according to St. Paul. For example, he begins his Epistle to the Colossians: "Paul, and apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to all the saints and faithful brethren in Christ in Colossae . . ." He starts both letters to the Corinthians in much the same vein as well as those to the Romans and Ephesians. So it's our Feast Day too.

And there's no better way to mark it that by reviewing Jesus' Course: Sainthood 101. It was delivered to a bunch of people we don't usually think of as aspiring saints: Pharisees and Herodians. We all know who the Pharisees were, but who were the Herodians? Actually, they were folks we would know today as "secular humanists." And the fact that Jesus chose to teach Sainthood 101 to people like this shows that everyone is potentially a saint.

Jesus delivered the lesson during a weird encounter that took place just days before his crucifixion. The deeply religious

Pharisees had formed an unholy alliance with decidedly irreligious Herodians to entrap Jesus into making a comment worthy of the death penalty. And they planned to ensnare with a question to which there was no safe answer. It was: “Does Mosaic Law permit us to pay taxes to the Roman authorities?”

If Jesus answered “yes” the Pharisees would have condemned him to death as a blasphemer. If he had answered “no” the Herodians would have had the Romans execute him as a traitor.

Jesus, however, asked to see the coin in which the taxes were paid. The portrait on it was Caesar’s – just like George Washington’s on a quarter. This rendered the entire question moot. Everyone in Judea – including the Pharisees -- conducted his daily business in Roman currency. Thus they *de facto* accepted the legitimacy of the Roman government and thus its right to levy and collect taxes.

If Jesus had stopped there he would simply made a slick debating point. But he went on to say something that stunned them: “Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s and unto God those things which are Gods” This is not a simple statement of the obvious, a reasonable compromise.

It was an uncompromising assertion of God’s total supremacy over mankind’s affairs. A fundamental Judeo/Christian teaching is that we owe everything we have, including our very existence, is owed to, and belongs to, God. In both our spiritual and secular lives, our first duty – indeed, our only duty – is to God.

It was a devastating rebuke to both the secular humanists who casually shrugged off their religious obligations, and to

churchgoers who arrogate to themselves the role of God’s emissaries on earth while flouting the spirit his commandments. His statement is an uncompromising command that our faith demands we put God first in our lives, whatever our secular allegiance.

Sainthood 101 was in action when Jesus were watching was watching rich people flamboyantly donating huge sums of money to the Temple in Jerusalem. A poor widow timidly approached the alms basin and threw in two mites, a the smallest coins minted. Jesus remarked to his disciples: “That woman has given more than any of them. They gave from their abundance, but she gave everything she had.” But even though the woman had left herself destitute, Jesus didn’t suggest she had given too much. Unlike the others, she had given what she owed.

It is an obligation the early Christians took very seriously. Thousands went to their deaths rather than compromise on this point. All it took to be spared the arena was a pinch of incense burned in honor of Caesar – a mere formality. But Christians, all loyal citizens of Rome went to their deaths rather than deny their duty to God, even in this relatively inconsequential manner.

In 21st Century eyes it all seems a terrible waste. But the fact of the matter is that without their affirmation of the paramount nature of a Christian’s duty to God – we would not be enjoying the freedoms we enjoy today. The underlying tenet of our republic that each of us is equal in the eyes of God; an assertion that would be meaningless did we not acknowledge our Creator reigns supreme in the affairs of mankind. *AMEN.*

To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.