



# ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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Commemoration of All Saints, Trinity XXI, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017

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

Today we are celebrating the lives of people who include some of the most aggravating, hard-headed, stubborn, bloody-minded folks who have ever lived – people who, by their very nature, were exceedingly difficult to live with.

Today, we tend to picture all saints as wafting around heaven clad in flowing robes and with halos the size of dinner plates on their heads. Believe me, that is not the way their contemporaries saw them.

Take Francis of Assisi, for example: He was a fast living young tear-away when he received his call to a holy life. “Francis,” a vision of the risen Christ told him, “I want you to rebuild my Church.” His call to holiness did not initially enhance either his honesty or his commonsense.

Close by his family home was an old, tumbledown church that had long been out of use. His father was a wealthy merchant and Francis decided our Lord was asking him to raid his father’s warehouse and use the cash from the stolen stock to refurbish the ancient building.

His father was, naturally, furious and it apparently took a long lecture from one of the local priests to convince Francis that

when Jesus asked you to do something he expected you to use your own resources, not resources filched from other people.

Life with Francis didn’t get any easier after he had grasped the meaning of Jesus’ call – that God wanted him to rebuild the whole church by forming a new religious order embodying a true sense piety, self-sacrifice and service to all people, especially the poor. The bishop who ordained him deacon was thunderstruck when, immediately after he had laid his episcopal hands on him, Francis stripped naked, saying he was fulfilling his vow of poverty. To avoid scandal, the bishop hastily wrapped him in his cope.

Francis continued to take his vows of poverty literally to an exasperating degree. He and his brothers habitually dressed in sackcloth and when the brothers begged him for Psalters so they might sing the psalms, he refused. “If you get Psalters, next you’ll want prayer books,” he explained,

Francis literal interpretation of his vow of poverty is unique. But all saints tend to share the single-mindedness of purpose that made him so hard to live with – some, like him for a life time; others for a momentary act of heroic self-sacrifice.

The English Church's first recorded martyr, for instance, was Albanus, a Roman Centurion, who was probably not even baptized. He gave shelter to a priest on the run during the persecution of the late Third Century. Albanus changed clothes with the fugitive and dressed as the priest, surrendered to the authorities to give him time to get away. We do not know the reason for his brave and selfless act, but he was publicly beheaded for it in the town now named after him: St Albans.

Not every saint is venerated for acts of courage or lives of grinding poverty and self-sacrifice. John Chrysostom was one of the most brilliant preachers ever to grace a Christian pulpit. His name means "Golden Mouthed" and his sermons have come down to us all the way from the Fourth Century because he was followed everywhere by "groupies" who hired shorthand writers to take down his words verbatim.

His rhetoric so mesmerized his followers, they frequently applauded his sermons. St. John was so embarrassed by their enthusiasm he preached a sermon against clapping, but to no avail. The shorthand writers noted it was greeted with thunderous applause.

St. Benedict was the founder of Western monasticism. He founded twelve communities of monks before moving to Monte Cassino in the mountains of southern Italy.

His vision was that that "Christ ... may bring us all together to life eternal." His Order of Benedictines exists to this day. Indeed, our former associate rector, Fr. Rhae Kelley is a Benedictine.

But the saints we are giving thanks for today are by no means solely the giants of the Church, far from it. We are also

celebrating saints whose deeds are quite unknown to us but who live on in the names they have given to communities they once served: St. Loo, St. Ives, St. Oswy, and my personal favorite, St Wooloo – four saints whose piety and good works made them by-words in the English West Country.

Then there are the saints we have all known personally. My own saints include Mrs. White, the schoolteacher who taught our entire village to read write and figure; Tom Carvely, a Methodist minister whose kindness, decency and skill with a cricket bat earned love and respect that extended way beyond his immediate flock; Miss Leaper, a Sunday school teacher whose talent for story-telling brought the Bible to life.

Here at St. Stephen's we have our own share of saints. Some have passed on to their heavenly rewards, but some are still with us. I won't name them and not just because I wouldn't like to embarrass them but because there are so many of them I fear I might leave out some names.

This is because the apostle Paul called all members of the church "saints." 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 . . ." This is no isolated example. He starts both letters to the Corinthians in much the same vein as well as those to the Romans and Ephesians. Strikingly, he does not address the Galatians as saints, but then he bawling them out for faithlessness and inconstancy.

This, in turn, explains why saints can be so aggravating, hard-headed, stubborn, bloody-minded. They are people just like us. In fact, we are just like them. The Feast of All Saints is our day too. So I wish you all a very happy holiday. *AMEN.*