

The Pathway to Sainthood! Reading: Luke 6:20-31 All Saints/C 11-06-22
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Do you know who Edith Cavell was? Edith was a British nurse working in German-occupied Belgium during the First World War. She is celebrated for saving the lives of soldiers from both the German and Allied forces without discrimination. She also helped some 200 Allied soldiers escape from German-occupied Belgium during the War for which she was arrested in 1915. Incarcerated and isolated in prison, she did not try to defend herself but only said in her defense that she felt compelled to help those in need.

Despite international pressure for mercy, she was sentenced to death and shot by a German firing squad. On the night before her execution, she was visited by an Anglican chaplain who recorded her final conversation. This is what Edith said: "Patriotism is not enough, I must have no hatred or bitterness toward anyone." She then wrote to her fellow nurses, saying: "I have told you that devotion will give you real happiness, and the thought that you have done, before God and yourselves, your whole duty and with a good heart will be your greatest support in the hard moments of life and in the face of death."

Today we celebrate All Saints' Day. It is a day of celebration, remembering those we have loved and lost. All Saints' Day was originally instituted to remember those many saints who did not have a special day marked on the church calendar; those who served as outstanding examples of faithful Christians, folks like Edith Cavell. All Saints' Day is also an opportunity to acknowledge that death is a powerful force. And while death may scare and intimidate us, All Saints' Day can be a time when we can reaffirm the hope of the gospel that death does not have the final word.

So what is it that makes a person a saint? In summary, saints live the gospel in spectacular ways. Their stories inspire us & convince us to do more to claim the blessings of God and avoid the woes. Let's take a closer look at today's reading from the gospel of Luke to gain more insight about becoming a saint.

In today's reading, Jesus had previously gone up to the mountain where he spent the entire night in prayer to God. And when day time arrived, he called his disciples together and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles. Jesus then descended from the mountain with them and stood on a level plain. He was surrounded by crowds of people seeking a word or a gesture of hope. Those in the crowd tried to touch him, for healing power came out from him. Jesus then looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when you are hated, excluded and reviled, for your reward is great in heaven." "But woe to you who are rich, well-fed, laughing, and spoken well of." (Luke 6)

Luke's report of Jesus' Sermon on the Plain differs from Matthew's report of the Sermon on the Mount. It is perhaps one of the most politically divisive speeches that is recorded in the New Testament. These words of Jesus challenged the conventional wisdom of his time which is one of the reasons why he was ultimately executed. These words would certainly cause havoc today in our own halls of power, both in the House and in the Senate where our elected officials are often controlled by the rich whose money support political campaigns.

Today's gospel speaks for the oppressed. While this voice brings good news to the poor, it also challenges those of us who live comfortable lives. It is a warning to those who enjoy comfortable life styles at the expense of those at the bottom of society. This voice speaks directly against those who discriminate and punish people who exist on the margins, people who are currently being denied justice and dignity. I wonder just how many Christians in the United States reflect on today's gospel before they head to the voting booth or check off their ballots. Will they support candidates who care for the plight of the poor, the migrant, people of color, the elderly, and those who struggle? Or are they focused only on their own needs, voting for candidates who openly scorn those whom Jesus blessed?

Luke's gospel makes special claims for the poor, the hungry, the suffering, and outcast. If Jesus cared for and blessed these folks on the margins, then we who are followers of Jesus must join forces with him for the good of all humanity, not just for ourselves or our small circle of loved ones. We are called to

overthrow those patterns, policies, and relationships that depend on the suffering of many to support the life styles and bank accounts of the few.

The United States now has more income and wealth inequality than at any time in the last hundred years. This year, three multibillionaires own more wealth than the bottom half of American society – 160 million Americans. 68% of the total wealth in the United States is owned by the top 10 percent of earners. In comparison, the lowest 50 percent of earners only owned 3.2 percent of the total wealth. Today, half of our people live paycheck to paycheck and millions struggle on starvation wages. Despite a lifetime of work, half of older Americans have no savings and no idea how they will ever be able to retire with dignity, while 55% of seniors are trying to survive on an income of less than \$25,000 a year. This greed and disregard for those in the lower 50% is not sustainable for a healthy nation to flourish.

In the New Testament, the word ‘saints’ (*hagioi*) is the commonly used title for Christians. It means holy ones and referred to the followers of Jesus because they were considered consecrated to God. We who have been baptized into Christ have also been consecrated to God. This life of holiness to which we have committed ourselves is both challenging and difficult. The truth is, we all suffer in this life. So the question becomes, how do we behave in the midst of this suffering?

Will we respond to violence with violence, thus perpetuating the cycle of violence? Or will we do all in our power to seek peaceful resolutions even though our anger is righteous! Do we have a habit of engendering hate for our enemies and those who oppose our opinions? Or do we work on forgiving those who have hurt us, putting aside all resentment and retribution like Edith Cavell did during WWI. Do we give generously to those in need, tithing 10% of our income? Or do we keep most of our earnings for ourselves, thus expanding our life of comfort and pleasure? Today’s gospel ends with Jesus’ sound advice for the best pathway to sainthood: “Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

“Almighty and everlasting God, who kindles the flame of Your love in the hearts of the saints, grant us the same faith and power of love; that, as we rejoice in their triumphs, we may profit by their examples, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”