

Pledge of Our Inheritance

Psalm 149 & Ephesians 1:11-23

Rev. James Ramsey, November 3, 2013, *All Saints Day*

All Saints' Sunday remembers faithful souls in heaven – the “inheritance” we have received from those who have lived an important life for God. Today we honor family members, colleagues, ancestors here at East Union, who have, to use the words Paul wrote to Timothy, “fought the good fight, finished the race, kept the faith.” Many of us



have brought likenesses of those ones we remember, likenesses in the form of photos. I hope you will come up and view them right after the service, before we take them down. We will, in a few moments, pour cups of water into the baptismal font, honoring those saints in a special way and giving thanks to God for their lives. When you pour the water, I invite you to

say the name you honor. In this way we will have a kind of litany of the saints, even as we prepare to receive again the elements of communion, the Bread and the Cup.

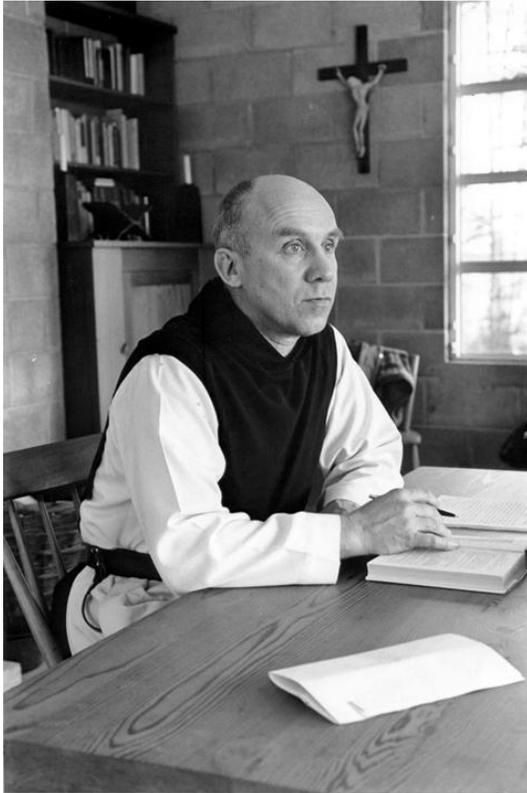
There are lots of ways of defining “a saint.” You might think of a saint as some holy man or woman from history, someone who has been officially canonized by the Catholic Church, someone to whom people pray for intercession, and of whom they wear little medals of their likeness. You could probably name St. Francis of Assisi or St. Joan of Arc, St. Martin, St. John of the Cross, St. Bartholomew, St. Therese of Liseaux. Many Roman Catholic churches are named after saints, St. Anne's, Sts. Peter and Paul, St. Catherine's. You probably know the term “patron saint.” There is a patron saint of almost everything. St. Clare of Assisi has been named the patron saint of television. St. Isidore is the patron saint of the internet. There is a patron saint of drivers, so that when our Catholic neighbor finally passed her driver's test, Jo and I wanted to celebrate her achievement and so we bought her a medal of St. Christopher to clip to her visor. She has not had an accident and so perhaps that likeness has helped her be cautious, alert and even faithful.

While many put stock in a saint's likeness, we might rather put stock in their likewise!

Likeness – to likewise!

I don't venerate the saints in the same way a Roman Catholic might, but I have been greatly edified by the stories and writings of traditional saints. I have learned from

their example and been instructed by their experience. I count saints as both those who have been canonized by more liturgical traditions, as well as those writers, mystics and scholars who have been able to explain and interpret the spiritual life. So I have several books that tell of the lives of the saints – and it is helpful to have a photo or, at least, a portrait – a likeness of the real person.



I have several pictures of one of my spiritual heroes, Thomas Merton. He was a Trappist Monk of the 20th Century. His likeness reminds me that he was a regular guy, who happened to answer the call of Jesus in a unique and uncommon way.

Most of these saints would not consider themselves as such. It's other Christians who have been inspired by their lives and seek to emulate them, seek to learn what they teach, seek to live as they did, to know and understand them, and to, well do likewise. These saints are so compelling because they followed Jesus with integrity and passion. Their likenesses might be helpful to some, but it was their commitment to Jesus, their willingness, to, as Jesus said, "Go and do likewise," that makes their lives significant.

The poet George Michael Leader calls such people – "likewisers." He writes...

*Some people think that
being a Christian is wearing
nice clothes and driving a
nice car*

*To a nice church on a nice
Sunday.*

*And perhaps leading our
selfish lives six days a week.*

*This would come as a great
surprise to Jesus.*

*He told us to go and do
likewise...And how did he define likewise?*



To heal the sick.

Feed the hungry.

Clothe the naked.

Visit the imprisoned.

No mention of going
to church,

But if going to church
motivates you to be

A likewiser, I am sure
that Jesus would
approve.

Jesus would
encourage us to look
inward

And then serve outward.



When we come to the Lord's Table – which we call *Communion*, we imagine the Great Heavenly Banquet where all God's people will gather at the culmination of history. When we taste the bread and drink the cup – understand that we are not alone here, but are joined by what we call the communion of the saints – a beautiful gathering of “likewisers” from all time.

“Likewisers” are saints – and not just from history and heaven. We must be careful not to overemphasize the afterlife, lest it prevent us from seeing the saints who are alive and working among us.

When Pope John Paul II died, several years ago now, millions of people flocked to the Vatican in Rome to pay their respects. A cry quickly spread through the crowd, “Santo subito ... santo subito.”

The phrase also appeared on hand-painted signs held up by worshipers at the funeral. **Santo subito....Translation: “Sainthood immediately.”**

Current Pope Benedict said later, "In the communion of saints, it seems we can hear the living voice of our beloved John Paul II." He was convinced that John Paul

communied with the saints in heaven, inspiring and guiding the church from his new location.



But why is it that people tend to focus on saints in heaven? – when the Bible clearly emphasizes the saints who are living right here on earth.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes, "I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints"

(1:15). Whenever the Apostle Paul speaks of saints, he is talking about members of the church, a group of people chosen by God and set apart to do God's work in the world. Saints are holy people, but their holiness doesn't come from achieving some kind of moral perfection. Instead, they have a holiness that comes from being marked as God's people. God "chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world," insists Paul, "to be holy and blameless before him in love" (v. 4).

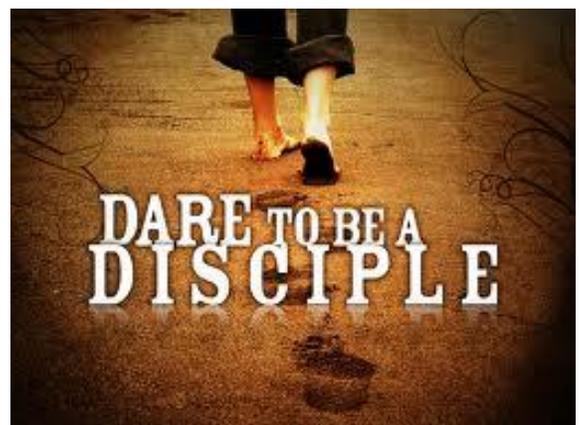
God chose us and set us apart — this is the key insight into saintliness. Paul says that we're saints because we are "in Christ Jesus," with a mission to produce a "harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:1, 11).

Santo subito ... sainthood immediately. The challenge for us is to live a santo subito life, among saints who are at work in the church and the world. To be Christians means that we are holy people serving a holy Lord. We follow in the footsteps of others, some of them pictured here on our table. What is the Pledge of our Inheritance? What kind of life shall we lead?

Paul describes holiness in his Letter to the Ephesians: "I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints."

The FIRST sign of saintliness... Faith in the Lord Jesus.

Jesus is the way to God – staking your life on this truth is a holy undertaking. It's not glamorous or complicated. Saints, plain and simple, follow Jesus on the way to God.



The SECOND sign of saintliness... Love toward all the saints.

In the first days of the earliest church, the saints were part of a close-knit community of care and concern, one in which love was demonstrated by acts of practical service.



The Book of Acts tells the story of the early Christians appointing Deacons to make certain that widows and the needy got some relief (Acts 6:1-7).

“Contribute to the needs of the saints,” wrote Paul to the Romans; “extend hospitality to strangers” (Romans 12:13). Paul wrote to the young Timothy to tell him to commend the widows for showing hospitality, washing the feet of the

saints, and helping the afflicted. Paul spearheaded a collection for the church in Jerusalem, and described it as a special “ministry to the saints” (2 Corinthians 8:4).

And the THIRD sign of saintliness... A spirit of wisdom and revelation.

Paul wrote, “I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.”

(You might have noticed the mention of “hope” in this text, which is no surprise as the Apostle Paul is fond of the triad, FAITH, HOPE and LOVE. “Faith, hope and love abide...”)



Saints assume that God is always ahead of them, leading them, calling them. God is not lost, absent or stuck behind them. Saints are constantly seeking to learn what God is revealing to them. Their eyes, ears, and hearts are open to God's direction.

Some of you might remember an entertainer by the name of Gracie Allen. If you don't remember her, you surely remember her comedian husband, his name was George Burns.

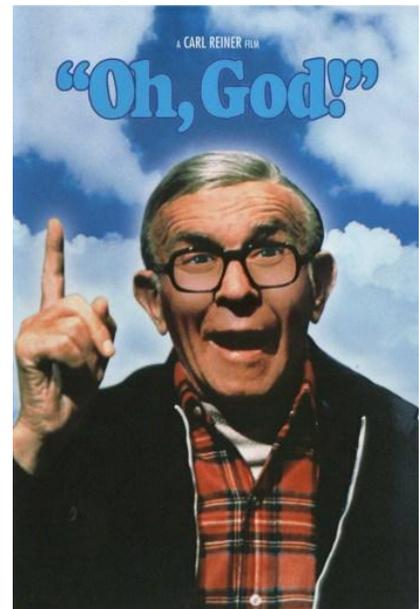
He was the main character in a movie, titled "Oh God," where God appears to a supermarket manager in the form of an old man. The movie spawned two sequels and George Burns garnered wide acclaim as the old man.

Anyway, Burns' wife, Gracie Allen, died long before her husband. But she left a message which he discovered after her death: "Never put a period where God has placed a comma."

Gracie was encouraging George to remember that life had many chapters. George was 68 when Gracie died. Rather than place a period after his career, Burns went on to star in a number of movies, including the "Oh, God" films. He died at age 100, having lived the life of the comma.

"Never put a period where God has placed a comma." That's what it is to live with hope – to cultivate a spirit of wisdom and revelation – to open your heart everyday to God's leading.

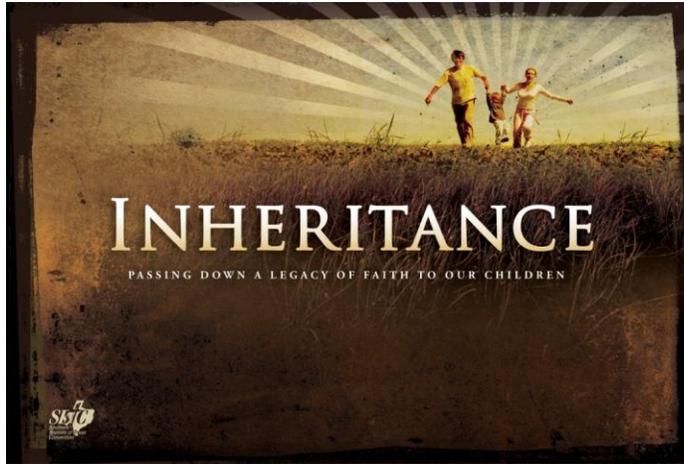
We're coming up on Thanksgiving.



Way back when the Pilgrims sailed from Holland to the new world on the Mayflower, their pastor John Robinson, who was forbidden to go with them, sent them off with another momentous phrase, "There is yet more truth and light to break forth from God's holy word." He was wishing for them a spirit of wisdom and revelation.

All the saints have not died, nor do they all

reside in heaven. Thank God for the inheritance they have passed on to us – their fellow saints on earth. You don't have to wait to be a saint. Saintliness is not other-worldly. In fact, "santo subito" is the Pledge of our Inheritance.



Faith in the Lord Jesus.

Love toward all the saints.

A spirit of wisdom and revelation.

These are the keys to a santo subito life!

This is our pledge.

To be a saint is to be a "likewiser!"

Go, and do likewise!

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.