
My Sermon from “All Saints Sunday” November 6, 2022 ~ “For All The Saints”

Speak Lord, your servants are listening. Amen.

“Let me get through today, and I shall not fear tomorrow.”

This statement was made by **St. Philip Neri**, a 16th century Italian priest who was canonized by Pope Gregory in 1622. St. Philip was known for his sense of humour and once he intentionally mispronounced every biblical name he could during a sermon. The worshippers did not know until the end of the sermon that he was trying to be funny.

‘All Saints Day’ is celebrated on November 1 and then the church celebrates “All Saints Sunday” on the Sunday next, which this year is today, November 6.

I spoke on ‘Anglicanism’ at a seminar last Wednesday evening at *St. Paul’s United Church* and I stressed our **unity in diversity** ~ how Anglicans can be at opposite ends of the spectrum on certain issues and still remain together. The reason we can do this is through our core theology on the gospel ~ the incarnation, and the resurrection. However, there are many other issues on which there are many opinions.

And “All Saints” is one of those. What do you believe about Saints in the Christian Church? The Protestant teaching is that we are part of the sainthood of all believers and that all baptized persons can strive for lives of holiness, rooted in Christ. We are all saints. This morning we are recognizing the saints in the church through our candle-lit procession of people celebrating baptisms during the last 12 months and remembering loved ones whom the Lord has taken home during the last 12 months.

The pre-reformation teaching is that some people lead exemplary lives of holiness and can be recognized and respected for how they have lived. They can be an inspiration to us. And we pray for the grace to follow their examples and to be similar instruments of God working in us and through us.

The Anglican Church has a book, called ***For All the Saints***, and I celebrate that we remember holy men and women ~ priests, bishops, monks, nuns, missionaries, martyrs, kings, queens, reformers ~ who have given their all for the community of the body of Christ.

We give thanks to God for the saints and we pray for grace to be like them.

One of my favourite saints is a man named **Jan Hus**, and although I am drawn to him because his first name “Jan” is the same name as my favourite (and only) son-in-law, I celebrate his desire to reform the church.

Jan Hus was a Czech priest who was executed in 1415 because he advocated reforms in the Roman Catholic Church.

Hus was a theologian and was filled with goodness. He spoke



out against the abuses of the church at the time. Sadly, it was German churchmen in Prague who had him targeted and tried on false charges of heresy. Jan Hus was burned at the stake by Christians on July 6, 1415. Roman Catholic scholars now agree that he was unjustly condemned and that he was a great teacher, and a great man of faith, with great courage.

Here is part of what Reformer Jan wrote on the eve of his execution.

"I, Jan Hus, in hope a servant of Jesus Christ, am not willing to declare that every article drawn from my books is erroneous, Secondly, concerning the articles ascribed to me by false witnesses, I am not willing to confess that I have asserted, preached, and held them. Thirdly, I am not willing to recant, lest I commit perjury."

And then he goes on to write this: *"For God's sake, preserve the letters carefully."*

And they were preserved. And his legacy has been vindicated.

Jan Hus paved the way for the Protestant Reformation. He spoke just before the introduction of the Gutenberg printing press which would have made it possible to get his ideas out to the people. In 1452, 37 years after Hus was burned at the stake, Gutenberg printed the Bible and this opened the door to the common people, for the first time, being able to read the scriptures without interpretations by clergy.

One hundred years later, Martin Luther's sermons and books were printed and hundreds of thousands of copies were made available to Christians in Europe. This enabled reformation ideas to get out to the people.

Another person standing out for me in our Anglican ***For All the Saints*** book is **Saint Hilda**. This is the name of the residence where I lived for 2 years as an undergrad at



Trinity College at the University of Toronto. Here is a photo of St. Hilda's College:

St. Hilda was a seventh century Englishwoman; she was a nun and the Abbess of Whitby.

She became a nun when she was 33 years old and, under her leadership, the community of nuns in Whitby became the most famous religious community in all of England! People came to see her to receive her spiritual support and guidance. She showed great devotion and grace, and she used her gifts of holiness and wisdom to nurture the God-given gifts in others.



In the November issue of the Anglican national newspaper called *The Anglican Journal*, there is an article about Anglicans views of the saints. This article stresses the varying viewpoints among Canadian Anglicans about the saints. Some people support the 39 Articles of Religion, which are a list of doctrinal statements developed in England during the 16th century. They are included in the *Book of Common Prayer* and the 22nd article states this:

“The invocation of Saints is a fond thing vainly invented and is ... rather repugnant to the Word of God.” (BCP, p. 707)

The “invocation of saints” means that you pray to the saints. Do you pray to the saints and ask the saints to pray with you just as you ask your family and friends? Anglicans today believe that you can pray with them and not to them. When we think about the “*communion of saints*” that we say in the Creed, we are referring to the fellowship of Christians both living and dead. We ask people we know and love for their prayers, so it does seem compatible to ask those who have died for prayers. There are some biblical references to this practice, as Jesus tells the story of a dead man asking Abraham to intercede on his behalf.

Other people state that the 39 articles are not a binding document for modern Anglicans and that they were used to disassociate the new Church of England from Roman Catholicism. Most Anglicans today like the recognized saints and turn to them as they show the presence of God in their lives and their transformations. We don’t focus on their miraculous deeds but on their loving service, rooted in Christ.

I believe that the stories we learn about the Christian men and women who have given their all to share the gospel are compelling and inspirational and motivate us to be Christ-centred. I personally am motivated to do better when I focus on the legacy of Jan Hus and Hilda of Whitby. I am not sure though if I will intentionally mispronounce biblical names in a sermon to be more like Philip Neri!!

In Luke’s **Sermon on The Plain** that you heard the opening portion of this morning (Luke 6:20-31), Jesus tells us to do good and expect nothing in return and to love those who mean us harm and have treated us badly and spoken badly about us. These are hard lessons that require discipline and spiritual strength. We receive this strength through our baptisms and then spend our lives praying to grow in wisdom.

You don’t have to believe in saints to receive your salvation but the saints have much to teach us. On this All Saints Sunday, let us listen to the voice of the psalmist who tells us to praise God through singing with joy, and through dancing. To me, this is saintly behaviour.

I began with the words of St. Philip Neri and I will close with the same words:

“Let me get through today and I shall not fear tomorrow.”

Amen.

Archdeacon Deborah+

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