

All Saints Day, 2009
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Today is All Saint's Day, a principle feast of the Church. On All Saints' Day we remember and praise God for the lives of those who have gone before us, disciples of Jesus Christ and heroes of the Church. They have set a standard for us that we should try our best to emulate, a standard of discipleship, a standard of being servants of Jesus Christ. The saints have done the extraordinarily difficult task of emptying themselves of selfishness, to the extent that it truly could be that they died to self.

There is an old hymn, "Onward Christian soldiers," that describes the work and the lives of the saints, for they did daily battle with evil and challenged the gates of hell. They are our Church heroes. They are the hallmark by which we measure ourselves. All too frequently, when we compare our lives against the saints, we see nothing but our failure. Yet, the lives of the saints are not measurements of our failure. Rather, they are beacons in the darkness of our lives calling us to the light, calling us to Christ, calling us to be holy, too. And, the lives of the saints say to us, "Holiness is not impossible." We can do it. We can overcome our indifference. We can shrug off our lethargy. We can go to the holy mountain. We can experience transfiguration by the grace of Jesus Christ. Then, we can die to self and live devout and holy lives as disciples of Jesus, citizens of the Kingdom of God. It is not an impossible task and the lives of the saints show us the way.

We know, though, that there are not many saints. There is a reason that their numbers are relatively few. It is human to want what Dietrich Bonhoeffer once called "cheap grace". We want the benefits of Christianity with out the dedication. We want salvation without sacrifice. We want to calculate in advance, as a matter of doctrine, that Christ having died for us we are freed of the price of sin, so that we are free to sin. This is a horrible corruption of Calvary, but it is a corruption that is the human norm. The temptation is to reason that because God loves us so much that in his Son he died for us, shed his blood for us as an atoning sacrifice, became the scapegoat for our sin, took our sin out of holy Zion so that we might live forever in Zion, we are free to get away with it "just one more time". The lives of the saints call us to something better.

The saints of the Christian Church lived extraordinary lives of utter love, lives of singular devotion to the Lord, because they chose to be his disciples. We are called to the same discipleship. We are called to the same holiness. We are called to sainthood, too. It is not an easy call. We are reminded of the rich man who came to Jesus and said, Rabbi, what must I do to inherit eternal life? You recall that Jesus told him that by his life, he was close to the Kingdom, that one thing was lacking, that he should go, sell all that he had, and then follow Jesus. The Lord asked him to give up that last bit of self-attachment and that was too much for him. He went sadly away.

To follow Christ requires self-denial and a willingness to take up the Cross. But we learn that carrying the Cross brings its own joy. All Saints Day reminds us that although

the way of the Cross may be trying it is not impossible. Others have gone that way before – All the Saints. *Amen.*