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November 9, 2021

**MUSINGS ABOUT ALL SAINTS’**

**T**he observance of All Saints’ Day (November 1 )  is an important celebration of one of the major feast days of the Christian year. The music recommended for the day is inspiring! “For All The Saints” and “I Sing A Song of the Saints of God” are two examples. Wonderful stuff! And yet why do I have the feeling that we are missing the core meaning of All Saints’ Day?

Its original name was All Martyr’s Day. It began in the fourth century as a setting aside of a special day in the church year for all those who had given their lives in witness to their faith. We know that a Feast of All Saints’ was observed in England on November 1st as early as the late eighth century. The Roman Church adopted this practice in 835 AD.  The Western Church has been celebrating All Saints’ Day for well over a thousand years (1186).

I believe that the real purpose of the day is to challenge us to evaluate our lives and do some comparison thinking about why early church martyrs like Peter and Paul were faithful unto death. Jesus expected committed behavior from his followers. The proof of that fact lies in a reading of Mark 8:34. “If anyone wants to be my follower, they must take up their own cross and follow me. Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. ” Those are not the kind of employment benefits that most people are looking for these days. And yet, I wonder?  The secret to effective leadership is clear expectations.

Jesus knew how to lead through challenge! He was able to touch a hidden key within ordinary men and women, a touch that brought forth within them elements of heroic character. Fear was displaced by determination and certainty. Jesus knew how to inspire courage! Here is a modern example of that kind of leadership.

During the early years of WWII, Great Britain found itself standing alone against the German juggernaut. In the depths of its darkest hour, the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill rallied his people with the following challenge: “I have nothing to offer you but blood, sweat, toil, and tears.” Using his great gift for oratory, Churchill was able to rise to the occasion and, consequently, so did the English people.

I have to wonder whether we think that church members today are receiving the same level of inspiration and challenge. Remember what I said earlier. We “celebrate All Saints’ Day because it is intended to challenge us. When people approach us and ask what they have to do to join the church (Christianity), perhaps we ought to read to them Mark 8:34: “If any want to become my followers, let them take up their cross and follow me.” That might provoke some interesting responses.

The mission of the Church and Christianity is not to make things easy for people. Struggle and difficulty are essential parts of achieving meaningful, fulfilling lives. Meaning and struggle are intertwined! Jesus knew that! Winston Churchill knew that! The great saints of the Church knew it! That’s why they persevered unto death. They were bearing witness to the truth.  The new life which they had received through Jesus was more valuable to them than their old, meaningless lives. God help us all to learn that lesson. **Amen**

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