

This transcript was developed using an AI-based speech to text generator. We apologize for any typos or other errors.

.

"I will, with God's help." The Rev. Dr. Andrew Armond (11/05/2023, The Feast of All Saints – Observed)

.

Almighty God, may the words of my mouth,
the meditations of all of our hearts
be acceptable in your sight.
O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer,
in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Please be seated.

Today is one of the four days in the church year
where we try to always schedule baptisms.
It is good that we have baptisms today
on all saints day.

All saints day is the first of November,
but we've transferred the feast to today.
And so we're celebrating this feast,
this important feast in the church calendar.
It's been celebrated over a thousand years,
the feast of all saints.

And so I want to talk to you for a few minutes this morning
about what that means and why we baptize,
especially on the feast of all saints.

One of the reasons that we do that
is that we're bringing new saints
into the kingdom of God.

St. Stella, Swanson, St. Mary, Francis, and Greer.

We are bringing new people into the kingdom of God today
through holy baptism.

This is a beautiful image that a lot of people share
around this time of year, at least on my social media,
which is predominantly other priests and church people.

So I've seen this picture a lot in the past week.

Maybe some of you have as well.

The artist is Jean-Colombe in the book of ours
of Louis de Laval.

So this is 550 or so year old image of all the saints.

It reminds me of the scripture

from the book of Revelation that is appointed for today.

A great multitude that no one could count

from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages.
This immense multitude of saints.
These are the people we celebrate in this feast day,
the people who have gone before us,
the people who are cheering us on,
who are praying and working in ways
that we probably can't even fathom or imagine
to help us in our Christian life through their encouragement.
And through their example that we can still talk about
and study today.
And so we are enabling two folks today
to join that great multitude, which is really quite wonderful.
Another image that is often shared from this image
is a detail if you zoom in a little bit.
And one of the things you notice when you zoom in
is that you can really only see the faces
of the first row or two in the original image, right?
Maybe about five rows.
And then beyond that, the images meant to suggest
that these halos of the saints just keep going.
On and on and on and on.
This is the great multitude
that no one could even possibly count.
There are so many wonderful saints in the kingdom of God.
I don't know why they're giving each other the side eye,
but maybe that's a sermon for another time.
In the Epistle Church, we commemorate
a lot of different folks on the church calendar.
Some of you may know in the Roman Catholic church,
there are people who are officially canonized as saints,
and that's a very lengthy process.
After the person has died,
the church committees have to meet,
and they have to examine,
there has to have been three miracles that have happened
as a result of people praying to that particular saint.
So it's this really lengthy process
and relatively few people sort of make it to that point
in the Roman Catholic church.
In the Episcopal Church, we just have a committee.
We have a committee and they get together
and they sort of say, you know,
who are the people in the 20th century
in the 21st century that are living lives
of outstanding faith that we need to pay attention to,
that we need to celebrate, that we need to commemorate.
And so believe it or not,
what I'm gonna share with you this morning
is from an official publication of the Episcopal Church.
Now, you got an extra hour of sleep.

So you're gonna be fine, right?
If I give you this, okay.
But this is really lovely,
because what it is, it's the explanation or justification
of how and why we make saints in the Episcopal Church.
And I really like the way that they've put this.
First of all, they say the saints like us,
no, that's not what they say first.
Oh no, I'm missing a slide, that's okay.
I'm gonna pull it out from my book right now.
I'll keep this up at the same time
because I really want you to hear this.
It says this, what we celebrate in the lives of the saints
is the presence of Christ,
expressing itself in and through particular lives,
lived in the midst of specific historical circumstances.
There's two phrases I want you to pick up on there.
Particular lives, the saints are real people.
They are born, they have parents, they have siblings,
they fight with their siblings, you know,
they went to school, you know, they fell in love,
they fell out of love.
The saints are real people, they had real particular lives.
Each one had a name just like every single one of us
in this room, and they live in the midst
of specific historical circumstances.
What that phrase suggests to me
is that all the saints have lived through times
in which it was probably easy to say,
things have never been as bad as they are now.
And I know that some of you have probably said that
over the last several years.
Maybe you've said that in the last few months
as you look at the violence in the world,
and the chaos, and the hatred in you say,
things have probably never been as bad as they are now.
Boy, we live in a specific set of historical circumstances,
but all the saints did.
All the saints lived within times
in which it was probably easy to say,
things may never be any better than this.
And so the amazing thing about saints is that we say
they were able to find and express the presence of Christ,
even in the midst of those specific,
challenging historical circumstances.
Now, to this.
There we go.
The saints like us are first and foremost redeemed sinners
in whom the risen Christ's words
to St. Paul come to fulfillment.

My grace is sufficient for you,
for my power is made perfect in weakness.
It is sometimes easy to imagine that saints are superheroes,
that saints have some kind of exalted powers almost,
but I want you to listen to that phrase,
my power is made perfect in weakness, not in strength.
In fact, then, it was probably at the times
in these saints' lives that they felt the weakest,
that Christ was most fully present to them,
and most fully active in their lives.
I want you to think about that in relationship
to your own life this morning, to your own weakness,
the way that you're experiencing that right now,
and to know that Christ's power is made perfect
in your weakness, not in your strength.
And this is true of all the saints.
I want to give you some examples of the sort of,
particular lives lived in the midst
of specific historical circumstances.
These are all folks that the Episcopal Church commemorates
as saints, particular lives,
specific historical circumstances.
One is Martin Luther King.
We have a prayer in fact written down
for each of these saints that we commemorate in the church.
I want you to think as I pray this prayer,
how that specific historical circumstance
and how that particular life melded,
and then what example we can draw from it.
We pray Almighty God, by the hand of Moses, your servant,
you led your people out of slavery
and made them free at last.
Grant that your church following the example
of your prophet, Martin Luther King, may resist
the oppression and the name of your love,
and may secure for all your children
the blessed liberty of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
Another example of this kind of 20th century sanctity
lived out in particular historical circumstances
is a woman you've never heard of.
Her name is Florence, Lee Tim Oy,
and she was the first female priest
in the Anglican Communion.
She was ordained in 1941 in China in the midst of World War II.
Her ordination was what we would call a regular.
The bishops did it and they meant it,
but it was done for a specific set of historical circumstances
so that she could bring holy communion
to people who were enduring war and persecution.
So they ordained her so that she could go and do this

so that she could be the light of Christ in this place.
In 1958, under the cultural revolution,
she was forbidden from being a priest
and she was not enabled to be a priest again
until the late 1990s.

So she had her ordination.

She ministered in the midst of a very difficult set
of historical circumstances,
and then that was taken away from her again.

And she thankfully, she moved to Canada later in the 1990s.
She was able to live out her priesthood
sort of in her retirement years.

And so we pray with Florence Leatham Oy
that we with faithfulness and patience and tenacity
would proclaim the Holy Gospel of Christ to all the nations.
Another example of a particular life lived out
in specific historical circumstances.

As the Longeons is the first African-American priest
in the Episcopal Church, he was made a priest
and the white church in the late 18th century in New England
would not allow him in his congregation
to serve alongside of them.

And so they went and founded their own congregation
and had a flourishing African-American Episcopal Church
here in the colonies in the late 18th century.

So we pray with Asimlan Jones
that we would show forth in our lives
the reconciling love and the true freedom
of the children of God.

And then finally, one of my favorite saints,
Julian of Norwich and Anchorite,
someone who lived in a cell essentially
and devoted her life to prayer and to writing
and to figuring out in her own life
how she could draw closer to Christ.

And she is said to have received this revelation
from God in which Jesus told her,

I can make all things well.

I will make all things well.

I shall make all things well

and you will see for yourself

that all manner of things shall be well.

This is a prayer that people sometimes use
in times of difficulty or stress or strife
to remember that Jesus has promised

that he will indeed make all things well

when often the evidence might be to the contrary.

In all of these cases again,

we have particular lives lived in the midst
of specific historical circumstances.

What I want to close with is the Beatitudes.
This is the sayings of Jesus that we have
in the gospel of Matthew today, the blessings, right?
And I want you to think as I say these about weakness,
about your own weaknesses
and about how the power of Christ is made perfect
through all of the weak places in our lives.
And I've taken out the sort of promise
that Jesus tax on to the end of each of these
because I just want you to think about these
for a moment in relationship to your own experience.
Blessed are the poor in spirit.
Blessed are those who mourn.
Blessed are the meek.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.
Blessed are the merciful.
Blessed are the pure and heart.
Blessed are the peacemakers.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness,
sake.
These are all weaknesses.
These are all evidence of weakness in our life,
of gaps of places where we feel that we are not strong
if we are poor in spirit or if we are mourning
or if we are meek
or if we were actually extending mercy to someone
rather than punishing them for their mistakes
where we are peacemakers
rather than ones who are continuing to be violence
in our lives, right?
And so Christ's power is made perfect in weakness
in the lives of the saints in all of these ways.
This is why I believe Jesus gives us this teaching
is in order to make us realize in all of these ways
the power of Christ is actually made perfect,
whole, complete, filling up all of those places in our lives
where we need the grace of God.
So I'll close with this.
I want to tie this back into baptism
since that's about what we're about to do.
We make these promises that you'll see
in the baptismal covenant
and what we have the opportunity to do
is a congregation today when we have a baptism
is for all of us to renew our own baptismal vows.
Our own sense of our faith in Christ
and what Christ has done for us.
And so we make these promises,
but I put in red what I believe are the three most important
words in the book of common prayer with God's help.

These promises are really wonderful and lovely
and we want to do them and we are yet finding ourselves
always unable to do them.

There's our weakness again.

And we say, I will with God's help
and God will always extend God's grace and forgiveness
to us when we fail to live up to these promises.

Our salvation lies not in what we do ourselves
but in what God does for us and through us and with us.
And so I want you to think about that.

I want you to find yourself in this picture.

I want you to imagine as we renew our own baptismal vows
and as we baptize that these folks are joining
the ranks of the saints and they are joining me and you
and all those who have gone before us as well.

Thanks to the grace of God.

Let's pray.

Well, many God, we are grateful for the examples
of the saints.

We are grateful for your grace that is operating
in their lives and that operates in our lives.

The same spirit, the same grace that inspired these saints
to do these amazing things is the same spirit
that you have given to each one of us.

We are so grateful for that gift and we pray now
that you would be with us as we proceed to holy baptism.

In your name we pray, amen.