

Year B John 11:32-44

Welcome Saints to the Kingdom of God.

This is a special day as we are reminded of all those who walked before us and also to point to us right here as active Saints in the community of Christians.

But what does that really mean?

Does that mean some of us are good and others are bad? Seems pretty simple but as we grow up we begin to see that the world we live in is not a Black and White affair... although we try really hard to keep things that way.

Our Bible stories show us clearly that those we would hold in High Esteem were not perfect nor are any of us. Moses was a murderer, David an Adulterer etc...

We like to idolize people and place them on a pedestal...but we will always be disappointed, as all will fall from that lofty perch! For no one can ever achieve those ideals...for however you choose to look at it...we may strive to live a perfect life... but we are not God are we? And because we here live “in between” and in the tension between the kingdom of man and the kingdom of God we will never get it perfect!

Now having said that there are some things that Jesus taught us that points the way to the quality of all Saints!

First of all in Baptism we have been received as Children of God. Today we celebrate All Saints Day...we celebrate all who were Baptized before us and have acted faithfully...listening to the voice of God and performing God's will and not ours in the face of worldly issues and obstacles.

Today we celebrate you and me... as Baptized Christians and as Saints

We are called to serve God and one another! Seems simple enough but what Jesus is pointing us to is a different kind of reality...and Jesus called it the Kingdom of God...or the Kingdom of Heaven.

Like Lazarus we are being called from our slumber to be made new and alive by our Lord! Discipleship and following Jesus calls us to serve God and one another.....

It's no secret that the upcoming elections are on a lot of folk's minds this week. How we act in the world reflects this calling. Do we choose to serve us and our own interests or do we seek to serve God and others?

...and how we act in the world will attest to us as saints... as members of the body of Christ that in the face of worldly issues and concerns we now act as God's voice in the world...striving to reveal the reality of the kingdom of God here and now!

Will you choose those things that your heart tells you is right...that may fly in the face of worldly concerns...Are we to serve our self and our own best interests or one another and God's wishes for a new community made new in Him for the good of ALL of creation?

In revelation we hear that John talks of seeing a new heaven and a new earth. God will wipe every tear from their eyes and death will be no more! God will make all things new if we trust in God and remain faithful to our Baptismal promises! Here Heaven and Earth are joined.

Jesus' weeps and mourns the death of his friend. By having faith in Jesus and trusting in him, even in the face of despair, even when all seems lost...without hope, even in death...Jesus will not be contained by the ways of man. Our Lord once again overcomes death and makes Lazarus rise a new! Jesus is always present to us!

What kind of community will our kids be born into. What kind of neighborhoods will they grow up in? What moral character will they see exemplified in us and in our community leaders... and what decisions made now will they have to live with in their future? As our children are raised a new, how will we raise them? Will our focus be on power, status and money or on service to others?

As Christians we are called to rise above the egocentric nature of the world. We are called to be in communion with God and each other. As we go forward will our community take on secular values or that of Jesus? Will that community be self-serving or will it take into consideration serving the needs of this community and the world for the benefit of all.

Although there is always two sides to every story, we must look above our differences and reflect on where the kingdom of God may be bursting forth in new spirit and life! If you are ever confused as to which way Jesus leans just read the sermon on the mount in it's entirety for clarity.

See most of our failure with our religion or with God really is just a failure of our Imaginations! What do you imagine a new earth to look like?

Jesus always values everyone. The kingdom of God belongs to everyone... there's hope for something bigger and better for everyone.

The posture of a Saint then is to value all of creation and the word Jesus uses for us and models for us is this posture of Love from the viewpoint of the creator! And Love wins every time!

I talked a few weeks ago about the currency of our lives...If I were to give you 24,500 dollars would that be a lot. But if I gave you 24,500 dollars and that's all the money you would have for the rest of your life? Now that same amount might not seem like much.

Well that's the currency of our lives. The average Human being will live for 24,500 days...that's it! So what are we going to do with your precious time here? Hopefully Love!

I also said that you cannot out love God! Many of us, however, have a small imagination when it comes to God...people think in terms of "conditional love" based upon fear and rewards and punishments... That's not Love at all and that certainly is NOT GOD!

By definition God is Love... so we can never out love God! And Jesus continually points us to our Father's love from the kingdom of God perspective.

The only thing that transforms our human existence (our 24,500 days) is love! Here in America it's all about me...so our love tends to become about me...what I want now...and if I don't get my way then I don't love you anymore...

In Jesus' time there were many words for love.

In Greek the language of the New Testament there's Philos being a good friend. (STAND BESIDES ARM AROUND SHOULDER).

Then there's the physical aspect of love. In the Greek the word is Eros...hugs and kisses. (HUG)

Then there's the self-sacrificing aspect of love... Agape. To think about someone else before yourself. Jesus uses that word a lot! (STAND IN FRONT OF)

...and notice that all these words for love have one thing in common...they focus on the other person...it's not about ME...in fact if it's love of God it's always going to be a love that focus on others...the way of Love is the way of ALL Saints... and that's how the kingdom of God is revealed!

Jesus continually strives to teach us a divine perspective - the first shall be last and the last first... whoever wants to be greatest must become like a servant to all...we must become like children to enter this kingdom...etc

And the disciples continually to try to make sense of all this. And they fail often cause it's not how we think...it's confusing and seems upside down to us.

For example...How do we in America follow a "powerless king"? We want powerful leaders...superheroes...its all about Power, Status and wealth. But the way of Love is about a different kind of Power...the seed...the yeast...the seemingly small things that have the power to transform the world!

Christian Fundamentalism or the Prosperity Gospel tells us that following Jesus results in us leading a rich and abundant life full of earthly power, wealth and fame...really...?! And many times the disciples believed that too... just like us they definitely wanted in on this New and Improved kingdom action...after all who doesn't want power, fame and glory! Look at the world today...we crave these things above all else!

We either have power, status, and wealth... or we envy the ones who do...or maybe, just maybe there is another way...another reality that's not so obvious to us? Like the disciples are we are as clueless as they were?

It's really counterintuitive...what do we seek in those we hold in high esteem? Just listen to those who seek to gain political power? What are they promising us...and why are we swallowing it! We all want strong leadership...people to restore us to the good old days...the days when we were on top of the world...but there is always a cost to that kind of earthly power isn't there? For someone to have much - many others have to have so much less.

The bible throughout models this notion of "just enough" and serving those who have less... but the world continually shows us a bleak picture of scarcity and "not enough" ...so how do we live within these tensions.

How do we wrestle with the fact that if we start to amass wealth and possessions for ourselves that we go beyond trusting God and begin trusting in ourselves.

How do we reconcile the need to be self-sufficient with the countercultural ways of God...pointing to something beyond our earthy comprehension...deeper and richer than we can imagine?

Jesus invites us to join the saints as part of a radical movement...to realize that in following Him and in being part of God's Kingdom that we open our eyes, our minds, and our hearts to the realities of this beautiful yet broken world.

I only know a couple of things about this life...everything changes, and no one gets out of here alive ...and suffering and death seem to be part of the equation that leads to our divine transformation.

When we suffer, or share in the suffering of others, we learn what it means to be dependent upon God... for it is when we are weakest that we see how powerless we truly are...but paradoxically... it is also here that we find and come to experience the living God in our midst!

There seems to be little reward in serving the least of these... but it changes the lives of those you touch...and it also changes you on a much deeper level while changing the world going forward... even beyond your lifetime!

True servant hood is a “one-on-one” affair witnessed and experienced at the level of the heart...usually when one person humbly and without fanfare or praise tends to the suffering and hurting of the world.

Jesus says that the “greatest of us all” must be servants to all...not by seeking WIFMs (What’s in it for me)... but by connecting with others for the sake of God’s greater reality. And when the “great” sacrifice themselves for the sake of all...then we see society as a whole begin to thrive. We see justice, peace, and harmony in our world.

We used to say: “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required.” We knew what that meant... the more you had, the more advantages you would have, and the more you were expected to serve. The more opportunities you were handed, the more you were expected to give yourself away for the benefit of others.

Throughout our history there have been those “great ones” who gave up their privilege and position for the sake of others and the greater good...and they all changed the world for the better beyond their lifetimes... Christ calls us into that reality! A way of life that leads to life for ALL of creation!

So why follow Jesus at all, especially if you are one of the "haves"?
Well that’s the choice we all have to face...Me or We...Power or Servanthood.
Do you wanna be First or Last?

Love God! Love One Another and one thing’s for sure...you will Change the World!

WELCOME to Discipleship...Welcome Saints of God!

Your faithful servant,
carmen