

FROM THE PASTOR: I'd raise my hand for 'All Saint's Day'

If you asked for a show of hands, most people in a congregation would probably vote for Christmas Eve as their favorite worship service of the year. Excellent choice – it's gorgeous, with the candles and carols and Christ Child lying in a manger. Others would probably pick Easter, the magnificent celebration of our Lord's triumph over the grave. This month, some might look to Thanksgiving (although it's not really a church holy day). As for me, this year, I'd more than likely be raising my hand, perhaps all by myself, for All Saints' Day. Why? Let me see if I can explain, but first some history: Our Lutheran practice is to celebrate All Saints Day on November 1 or the Sunday that falls after that date.

Traditionally, the commemoration of martyrs occurred on the anniversaries of their deaths. However, for all those whose death-dates were unknown, a commemoration for "all the martyrs" was established perhaps as early as c. 359 in Edessa (presently Turkey). (So this feast day is nearly as old as Christmas, which began in the 4th century.) And by the 7th century, this feast had begun to include non-martyrs as well.

The date for the festival varied in different parts of Europe and Asia. The use of Nov. 1 is first recorded in England in the 8th century. "According to John Beleth, Gregory IV in 835 transferred the feast from May 13 to November 1 after the harvest so that there would be sufficient food in Rome for the pilgrims."* (*Philip H. Pfatteicher, Festivals and Commemorations).

So why do I appreciate All Saints? Perhaps it has to do with remembering the definition.

The Greek word usually translated saint is "hagios". Literally, it is an adjective meaning: "holy" It can refer to "holy things" or "holy people". The word "holy" means "to set apart". I frequently paraphrase it to mean "special." Holy Communion is a "special" fellowship between God and us and each other. The Holy Bible is a "special" book. The Holy Spirit is the "special" breath or wind from God. God said, "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy" means to make that day "special". A form of that word is used in the Lord's prayer: "Hallowed be thy name." That means to make or treat God's name as holy -- to make it a "special" name.

So what's a saint? A saint is a holy person. What's a holy person? A holy person is special person. How do you become a saint or a special person? Here comes the grace moment:

In the Old Testament, things became holy through contact with other holy things. For instance, Exodus 29:37 gives the command: For seven days make atonement for the altar and consecrate it. Then the altar will be most holy, and whatever touches it will be holy.

What makes a book the Holy Bible? It has been in contact with the Holy God. What makes a wind or breath the Holy Spirit? It has been in contact with the Holy God. What makes a fellowship a Holy Communion? When we are in contact with the Holy God. **What makes a person a saint?** When he or she has been in contact with the Holy God. As one child put it, while looking at some stained glass windows of the apostles and other people of faith, "Saints are people that the light shines through." The light of Christ shining through each of us does indeed make us holy. Saints are also people who see Christ in others.

In the Old Testament, it was only a few people -- the priests who could come in contact with the holy things. Jesus changed that. Jesus opened the way for all of us to approach and come near to the holy God and become holy ourselves.

Being a saint comes as a gift from God. You are a saint because you are in contact with the Holy God -- or better, because the Holy God has come in contact with you. Being a saint is not something you do for yourself. We often think of a person as a saint because they live a very good life, but a saint is a saint because of their contact with the Holy God.

That's something to not only commemorate, but to continually celebrate. I like All Saint's Day; it reminds me of who I am and whose I am!



A Blessed Remembering!! *Pastor Karen*