All Saints Day

Revelation 7:9-end, 1 John 3: 1-3, Matthew 5:1-12 p370 in lectionary

A poem and prayer for **#AllSaintsDay** by Jan Richardson

For Those Who Walked With Us

For those

who walked with us,

this is a prayer.

For those

who have gone ahead,

this is a blessing.

For those

who touched and tended us,

who lingered with us

while they lived,

this is a thanksgiving.

For those

who journey still with us

in the shadows of awareness,

in the crevices of memory,

in the landscape of our dreams,

this is a benediction.

All Saints Sunday is a time to remember that holiness is an everyday calling shared by the entire community of believers, both living and departed

- Saints are not just distant figures carved in stone or martyrs from long ago; they are ordinary people—parents, doctors, teachers, and quiet servants—who let the light of Christ shine through their everyday lives.]

- And All Saints Day It is an opportunity to give thanks for the loved ones, mentors, and local church forebears whose faith and sacrifice kindled a light for others

"*Why do we neglect*," John Wesley wrote in his journal, "*giving honour to the saints?*" Why indeed? Maybe because we aren't tuned into the saintly. The word "Saintly" can become a slur, or a way to patronise someone. Yet we are drawn to them, to those who seem saintly. We are drawn to those who have a secret knowledge or relationship we don't have. We are drawn to those who seem grounded, confident, at peace. We are in awe of, or a little afraid of, those we identify as saints. But should we be?

A saint, according to the New Testament anyway, is not someone who is flawless or a super believer or doer. A saint is one who claims Christ and then seeks to emulate him according to the grace given. In other words, all of us. All those who come to church or wish they could, all those who claim faith in Jesus, all those who struggle and fail, and all those who struggle and succeed—all of us, in other words. We are saints. And so are those who worship with us. Those in our small groups and our committee meetings. Those who fold the bulletins and stuff the finance letters. Those who picked up the litter that blew in from the shops and those who didn't even notice it there. Those who sing the hymns, hear the words, and pray the prayers with us week by week. The saints are all around us. They are us.

That's not something we pay attention to very often, though. That is why we need a Sunday to stop and look up and see. Part of what we see is that some are no longer here. Most folks equate All Saints with remembering the dead. And that is an important part of what we do together. But one of the reasons for doing that is to remind us to pay attention to the living as well. None of us are here forever.

It wouldn't hurt to pay attention now and then to the saints all around us. They might have something to teach us. They might be able to help us with some challenging problem. They might add something to our lives if we let them.

But what sorts of things do saints do? Follow Jesus! Well, yes, thank you, But can we itemise a little more helpfully? Make a list.

Paul writes in his letter to the Thessalonians, "*Your faith is growing abundantly."* That is one mark of a saint, growing faith. How can we ensure that our faith is growing? Study and exercise, simple as that. Paul commends them for spending time studying their faith—in Sunday school or small groups—reading devotionally and academically, asking questions and testing themselves, and pushing the limits of knowledge and experience in a way that breathes new life and sustenance into their souls. "*We give thanks to God,*" writes Paul, "because your faith is growing abundantly." A saint is one who wants to learn more.

Secondly, Paul writes that *"the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.*" That is rather convoluted phrasing, but it means they were acting out their faith in real ways. They were caring for one another; they were including; they were inviting; they were tending and healing and comforting and lifting up. They made up a body that truly loved one another. What an amazing thing. Just think what would happen if everyone who visited our church came away convinced that we loved one another, not just tolerated one another or occupied the same space as one another but genuinely loved one another in a way that would include any who walked in as a potential "other" who would be loved. Wouldn't that be transforming? Wouldn't that guest be likely to come back to experience that love again? "*Your love is increasing,"* writes Paul.

You are discovering new expressions, new ways of loving, and new ways to reach out and connect with another to make a difference in someone else's life. A saint is one who wants to love more.

Then Paul writes that he boasts "*of your steadfastness and faith*" even when things are going wrong. He was commending the church for staying true to the image of Christ within them even when it wasn't easy. He then goes on, to remind them that they are still works in progress. God will make you worthy, and God will fulfill every work within you. God is still at work in saints; they are never a finished product. A saint is one who wants to be more.

The amazing thing is that they are all around us. They are us. Some have gone on, and we miss them. But many are still here, just under the radar. We'd see them if we paid a little more attention. If we would just stand firm and hold fast with love increasing, we might find that there are saints abounding among us.