

32963 Faith Column for 10-27-11
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To All the Saints

In the “Dictionary of Occupational Titles” you will find listed over 12,000 job titles which are in use in America. Among the religious titles (which particularly interested us) we found imam, priest, rabbi, cantor, bishop, dean, father, sister, mother, brother, pastor, deacon, warden, moderator, president, the right reverend, most reverend, very reverend, and even the right very reverend!

Yet here is an interesting thing to contemplate as our annual celebration of All Saints’ Day is about to occur: among those 12,000 job titles, not one single listing of “saint” or any variation of “saint” could be found. But come to think of it, we’ve never seen an ad looking for one. And maybe, if we got right down to it, we’d find the prospect of being recruited for sainthood pretty unappealing, anyhow. There aren’t many applying for the job these days.

For many, sainthood seems to have a rather unappealing reputation. With its historic linkage to martyrdom and miracles, it may seem to us, as modern people, to have seemingly little relevance to our lives. And yet, since the eighth century, the church has celebrated its saints, both living and dead, on All Saints’ Day. So maybe we should not be too quick to dismiss sainthood. It’s had staying power.

Did you know that Saint Paul called all church members saints? In his first letter to the Corinthians, he addressed the readers this way: “To all the *saints*,” as if everyone in that little church had been entrusted with sainthood. You see in Paul’s mind, we become saints apart from any prior moral goodness or righteousness. It usually happens the other way around. First God sets us apart and makes us saints, and then we are asked to live a life appropriate to that calling. Saint Paul might tell us to look around. We’re probably in the midst of a whole, shining, glowing, bright communion of saints every single day. Have you spotted any lately?

Phillips Brooks, a professor of theology, was a spotter of the sacredness in people. He was once asked by his students why he was a Christian. He answered that it was because of his aunt in Teaneck, New Jersey. Her life shone, he said, with a brightness and beauty of goodness. It gave her an almost transparent quality that permitted seeing glimmers of something dancing within her. She glowed with a light so lovely that he wanted with all of his heart to know the source of it. When he learned its source, he followed her in her faith.

Have you known people like that? People whose lives glimmered and danced with something extraordinary? People who by their nature were so captivating or so good that you wanted with all your heart to know the secret behind it and to emulate them? These are surely the saints you’ve encountered.

And here’s an intriguing matter to consider: we may have the chance to be saints for someone else today, or tomorrow, or maybe every day. Because, heaven knows, we are all invited to be a part of the great communion of saints we celebrate on November 1st. We are invited to show forth to the world the brilliance of what is most sacred – by our compassion, by our generosity, by our forgiveness, by our hospitality, by our love. We are capable of sainthood on that pattern. Perhaps it’s time to claim the title for ourselves!

Greetings and blessings to all you saints!