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St. Paul's Episcopal Church (Cleveland Heights, OH)
All Saints' Sunday, Year C / November 6, 2022

Baptized Into Sainthood

One of my favorite moments in our worship each Sunday is when the People come forward to receive Communion. There is something profoundly beautiful about this holy procession. Before I was a priest, I always sat in the seat closest to the aisle, so I could get an up-close view of this procession. People of all ages and stations in life making their pilgrimage to the altar. Some walking joyfully, others under the burden by grief, others pushing through doubt -- but all of them putting one foot in front of the other, seeking an encounter with God. I often think about their ancestors in the faith who walked the path before them, and the generations to come who will one day walk the same well-worn path.

This fellowship of faithful pilgrims I'm describing has a name: the Communion of Saints. Today, on this Feast of All Saints, we celebrate this great multitude. And not just the heroes of the faith everyone knows -- like our patron Paul the Apostle, Francis of Assisi, or Teresa of Avila -- but also, the faithful Christians who will never be depicted in stained-glass windows, but whose lives witnessed to the resurrection of Jesus all the same. Members of our community who have gone on to greater glory. Saints like, Rich and Mary Nodar, Ann Farmer, and Poleda Moodie, to name just a few. This communion of saints even includes those of us gathered here today. As the hymn we just sang reminds us: "They lived not only in ages past; there are hundreds of thousands still...for the saints of God are just folk like me, and I mean to be one too."

Today, we have the incredible joy of welcoming five new saints into the body of Christ: Jack, Nathan, Tommie Jo, Ezra and Naleli. Through holy water and ancient prayers, these children will momentarily take their place among the great Communion of Saints. Now, I'm mindful that our parents and godparents might be feeling a little pressure right now, having the title 'saint' bestowed upon their little ones. They might be wondering if they're expected to raise little Mother Theresa(s) and Martin Luther King Jr(s)?! And the answer is no, not exactly. But the promises they're about to make are big promises, nonetheless. Helping these children to "grow into the full stature of Christ" is a big responsibility.

So, I say this to you, Parents & Godparents. If you remember only one thing I say today, please remember this: There are promises being made to you and these children today, too. This will become evident in a moment when the saints gathered here rise to their feet and "promise to do all in [their] power to support" these children "in their life in Christ." For when we enter the fellowship of the saints, we are promised something very important: that we are never, ever alone. When we emerge from the waters of baptism, we find eternal solidarity with a spiritual company. A company that will never leave us to fend for ourselves on our pilgrimage of faith.

On the unknown path that lies before these five children, there are saints God will place alongside them. Saints whose names they will never know who will prepare the way for them. Saints who will extend the hand of friendship to lift

them up when they fall. Indeed, there are saints standing before the throne of God in heaven *right now* offering prayers to help them on their way.

Of all the promises being made today, the most important one of all comes from God. We heard this promise spoken in the prayer that opened today's worship. Listen to it again: "Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son..." In baptism, God knits us into a divine fellowship. He binds us to himself and one another in a bond that can never be broken. And as he knits us into this tapestry of grace, we are clothed in the saving power of his Son's death and resurrection. The power of sin and death loses its grip on us, and we are free to live forever in the light of resurrection.

On behalf of Jack, Nathan, Tommie Joe, Ezra and Naleli, today we offer a resounding 'yes' to God's grace. We welcome them to take their place in the holy procession of saints. To take their seat at the table where we share one bread and one cup. To join with all the saints, both in heaven and on earth, to live "for the praise of God's glory." Amen.

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