

All Saints Weekend (RCL/C) "To the Saints, God's Beloved, at Holy Trinity"  
Ephesians 1:11-23, Luke 6:20-31  
November 5-6, 2022  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

On All Saints we remember the great friends of Jesus who have lived through the ages and whose names are in books or on church marquees – **and** we remember the great friends of Jesus whom **we** have been blessed to know and whose names may not have appeared anywhere but in the tax records and in the phone book (if you remember those ☺). This All Saints weekend I encourage us all to think about a particular soul friend, a mentor in faith, a companion on our Christian journey, who has accompanied us, inspired us, challenged us to become more Christ-like, if not in words, then by their living example.

I've told you before about my Grandma Flossie Horton, my Dad, my stepmom Mimi. Today the soul friend I'm thinking of, though, is Brother John Lavelle, a Brother of the Congregation of Holy Cross, the order that founded my alma mater, Notre Dame. Brother John was like the campus Grandfather. He lived in the Brothers' residence, on a hill between the 2 lakes on campus, St. Mary and St. Joseph Lake. Brother John was retired from his formal teaching career, but not from ministry, for sure. He was like "go to" family for many of my friends and I who were far away from home. We knew we could find him every night at the Grotto at evening devotions, or just about any other time at the Brothers' house. We'd ring the bell and Brother John would invite us in for cocoa and cookies. At the end of freshman, sophomore, junior years, there was always stuff in our dorm rooms we knew we'd need the next year but didn't want to lug home (and sure couldn't pay to store). Brother John would tuck it into a corner of the attic in the Brothers' residence, where we'd find it waiting for us when we returned at the end of August. One year he wrote to post offices all over the country in towns that bore our first and last names, asking them to return a

self-addressed stamped postcard he'd sent them. Then he laminated the return postmarks and created a bookmark for each of us. I still have mine: "MARY CHAMPION."

Other people taught me Old Testament theology, New Testament Greek, Jacques Maritain philosophy, church history and Spanish, important classes that counted toward my degree. But Brother John taught me even **more** important things: Christian hospitality, how to offer safe space to those who feel lonely, and the value of relating to people in a totally different generation. He was a true soul friend to me and my friends. I don't remember why he chose to be a religious Brother instead of a priest. (I think it may have had to do with his physical health.) But his ministry to me was as lifegiving as any.

I'm thinking of Brother John this All Saints Weekend because in the mail last week I received a Christopher News Note entitled, "You Are a Saint in Training." It talks about how we are **all** called to be saints, **all** given gifts to share with the world, some of them quite **humble**, from the outside looking in, but **still** important. One example of this is another Brother from Brother John's order, a Canadian whose name was Andre Bessette. He has been described as:

...sickly, could barely read, and was a lost soul of sorts. Yet he had a deep devotion to God, so his childhood pastor suggested Andre become a brother with the Congregation of Holy Cross. The pastor wrote a letter to the superior there, saying, "I am sending you a saint."

Andre followed this vocational calling, becoming a porter at Notre Dame College in Montreal, where he opened the door, closed the door, took messages, did the laundry, etc.... "When people came to the door, he would talk to them, he would comfort them, he would listen to them. And a million people filed past his casket after he died, because he became known as such a healing, wonderful, saintly man... If you said, 'Here's a formula for success: we're going to send a guy that can barely read to a monastery, and he's going to be a saint' – that's probably not what you'd think... and that's the beauty of it, the humility."<sup>1</sup>

St. Paul addresses one of his letters, "To the **saints** who are in Ephesus" (Ephesians 1:1b), another "To all the **saints** in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi" (Philippians 1:1b), and yet another

“To the **saints** and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae” (Colossians 1:2a). He wasn’t writing to people who stood on pedestals or who had visible halos or who preached great sermons or founded wonderful humanitarian organizations like UNICEF. He was basically writing to people in the pew and he called them **saints**. Already. Not because they always **acted** so holy but because they **were** holy in the literal sense –set apart for God’s purposes in this world, through Holy Baptism. Same for us!

When I was little I wanted to be good so I could go to Heaven. Now I realize God wants us to be good so Heaven can come to earth! “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.” Once I realize that God is **for me**, as Luther said, that Jesus has died and been raised **for me**, I am freed to live my life for God and for others. Faith is never just a tango between Jesus and me. Like spokes on a wheel that get closer to each other as they merge in the middle, the closer I come to Jesus, the closer I come to my brothers and sisters, in the Church and in the world.

There is such joy and love in serving others, even in the simplest ways. Serving cocoa to a homesick college student can be as Christ-like as serving lunch to a homeless man in a soup kitchen. Being a quiet, prayerful, encouraging presence in a young or an old person’s life can be as Christ-like as being a professional counselor. Teaching a kindergartener the Lord’s Prayer is as praiseworthy as advising a doctoral student. Raising children in a loving, faith-filled home is as important as serving as president of a university or of a country.

Charles Thomas Studd was a British missionary to China, India and Africa in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. He wrote a poem that included this verse:

**Only one life, ’twill soon be past,  
Only what’s done for Christ will last.**  
Give me Father, a purpose deep,  
In joy or sorrow Thy word to keep;  
Faithful and true what e’er the strife,  
Pleasing Thee in my daily life;

**Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.<sup>2</sup>**

When I think of our friend, Andre Bessette, the college porter now known by some as "Saint Andre Bessette," I remember a poem about humble, life-giving, God-anointed service, written by Samuel Moor Shoemaker, a leader in Alcoholics Anonymous in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Manhattan:

I stand by the door.  
I neither go too far in, nor stay too far out,  
The door is the most important door in the world –  
it is the door through which folks walk when they find God.  
There's no use my going way inside and staying there,  
when so many are still outside, and they, as much as I,  
crave to know where the door is.

And all that many ever find  
is only the wall where a door ought to be.  
They creep along the wall like blind men,  
with outstretched, groping hands,  
feeling for a door, knowing there must be a door.

Yet they never find it...  
So I stand by the door.

The most tremendous thing in the world  
is for people to find that door – the door to God.  
The most important thing anyone can do  
is to take hold of one of those blind, groping hands,  
and put it on the latch – the latch that only clicks  
and opens to that person's touch.  
People die outside that door, as starving beggars die  
on cold nights in cruel cities in the dead of winter –  
die for want of what is within their grasp.  
Others *live*, on the other side of it –  
because they *have* found it,  
and open it, and walk in, and find Him...  
So I stand by the door...

I admire the people who go way in.  
But I wish they would not forget how it was  
before they got in. Then they would be able to help  
the people who have not yet even found the door,  
or the people who want to run away again from God.

You can go in too deeply, and stay in too long,  
and forget the people outside the door.

As for me, I shall take my old accustomed place,  
near enough to God to hear Him, and know He is there,  
but not so far from others as not to hear them,  
and remember they are there, too.

Where? Outside the door –  
thousands of them, millions of them.  
But – more important for me –  
one of them, two of them, ten of them,  
whose hands I am intended to put on the latch.  
So I shall stand by the door and wait  
for those who seek it.  
'I had rather be a doorkeeper...'  
So I stand by the door.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever station God calls us to in this life, doorkeeper at the threshold, usher in the aisle, actor in the spotlights, stage crew behind the scenes, valet parker out front, we **all** have a vocation, a genuine and holy calling. It can be lived out in any profession, in any place, in any time. It is the vocation to love God above all else and our neighbors as ourselves. So, fellow saints, let's go out there and follow St. Francis' advice: "Preach the Gospel. If necessary, use words." Amen

<sup>1</sup>"You Are a Saint in Training," Christopher News Notes, #649.

<sup>2</sup>C.T. Studd, "Only One Life, 'Twill Soon Be Past," Words of Wisdom from the Cloud of Witnesses, [www.reasonsforhopeJesus.com](http://www.reasonsforhopeJesus.com).

<sup>3</sup>Samuel Moor Shoemaker, "I Stand by the Door," *Celtic Daily Prayer* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), pp. 624-627.

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