

All Saints Nov 1 2006

Ecclesiasticus 44:1-10, 13-14

Psalm 149

Revelation 7:2-4, 9-17

Matthew 5:1-12

Let us now sing the praises of famous men [sic] and I am certain the writer of Ecclesiasticus meant both genders of the human species. We remember those who ruled, those who counseled, those who fought with valor making a name for themselves, those who shared their intelligence, and those who composed musical tunes or wrote inspirational verse. Their bodies are buried in peace but their names live on generation to generation.

The autumn triduum extends from all hallows eve – through all saints – and all souls celebrating the reality of death and the centrality of Christian hope. All Hallows' Eve was used to confront the power of death with the power of humor and ridicule. Commemorating All Saints we give thanks to the victory of incarnate goodness embodied in remarkable deeds and doers triumphing over the misanthropy of darkness and devils. On All Souls we proclaim the hope of common mortality. Sadly, in our day, we find more interest in costumes and candy than in remembering the deeds of faithful ancestors in faith who encourage our hope. Pumpkins are more popular than saints. Perhaps in part we use the trivial and urbane to mask our fear of death, our anxiety about the grade we are making in life. If that is so, on this day of remembrance of all the saints, we ought to examine why certain individuals stand out in our memory and become members of the Saints Hall of Fame in order to encourage our faith journey and build us up in hope.

We as Christians claim a hope that goes beyond the constraints of mortality. We speak of a faith that affirms the incarnation as the word of God becoming flesh, dying on a cross and rising from the dead making the gate of eternity open for all. We claim resurrection as the distinctively Christian mark separating us from other faith and religious traditions. We hope because we have faith that God as revealed in Jesus demonstrated that love is greater than death. Rising from the grave, the risen one made all things new. We hope in reunion with God and all who have died – a

re-communion with the blessed – counting ourselves among those known and claimed by God. The longer I live, the more greeters I count on the distant shore. It may not be too long before my friends on earth are fewer than those in the embrace of the triune God.

We have no physical or scientific evidence to support our hope. We have our stories. We gamble on unproven witnesses whose word is that the resurrected Christ appeared to them and they were changed. Something happened to be sure. The disciples listening to Jesus as he sat on the grass on the hillside teaching the crowd failed to understand the depth and wisdom of his teaching as often as they understood. Those who could not stay the distance at the foot of the cross on a hillside called Golgotha, were changed. Something happened to change their fear and timidity to courage and faith. What? Our faith is built on the witness of those who experienced the post-resurrection presence of Christ.

Jesus appeared first according to the Gospel writers, to Mary Magdalene in the garden where she had gone to anoint the body with spices. Amazed that the tomb was empty, Mary asked a man she supposed was the gardener where the body was and when he spoke her name, Mary, she knew it was the Lord. According to tradition, Mary of Magdala was a wealthy influential woman who visited Tiberius Caesar to share the news of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. To explain her story, she picked up an egg from the table to make her point but before she could proceed, Caesar interjected that a human being could no more rise from the dead than the egg in her hand turn red. The egg immediately turned a deep crimson, the color of the eggs exchanged at Orthodox Easter celebrations.

Jesus instructs Mary not to touch him – perhaps indicating that she did not need to put her hand in his side or examine the pierced hands – as Thomas would request but by hearing his voice, she knew and would go and tell the other disciples he had risen as he told them. I agree with Sam Portaro's suggestion in [Brightest and Best: A Companion to the Lesser Feasts and Fasts](#) that in sending Mary forth to be the first apostle of the resurrection, Jesus continues the work of reversal. With no more qualifications than Mary or any other disciple chosen by Jesus in his ministry in Galilee, we too can go to the place others will not go. Venturing into a dark place of a predawn cemetery while her companions huddled in fear behind locked doors waiting for some glimmer of light to guide them from despair to hope, Mary Magdalene found what she was looking for because Jesus was faithful to his promise – an lo I am with you to the close of the age.

Jeremy Taylor was a priest in England during the seventeenth-century whose ministry spanned the reign of Charles I and Charles II, a time of royal politics and church conflict over traditional practice and theology. The period was marked by struggle with imprisonment for Taylor. In this

time of strong opinion, Taylor knew the value of tolerance and moderation. The legacy of Jeremy Taylor is found in the work, *Holy Living and Holy Dying*, written for a dying wife of his sponsor. His own life was marked by the shortness and uncertainty of human life having buried his four sons and his wife during his own lifetime. The brevity and precariousness of life refocused his mind and heart on important Christian truths. It was for Taylor a matter of Christian stewardship to focus on those things which are eternal rather than those which are temporal. St. Paul warned the Christians in Rome in the first century: “we do not live to ourselves and we do not die to ourselves” Romans 14:7.

Like Jeremy Taylor, Jonathan Myrick Daniels, a seminarian at EDS left the safety of Cambridge to join the Civil Rights struggle in Selma, Alabama in the spring of 1965. The march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, led by Martin Luther King, Jr. was viciously opposed. King made a public plea for justice and invited others into the struggle. Along with other classmates, Daniels flew to Selma, took up residence with the black families struggling for the privilege to vote. On August 14, Jonathan and his companions were arrested for participating in a picket line and released six days later. Seeking transportation, the four companions approached a store. As Ruby Sales reached the door of the store, the owner, Thomas Colman emerged with a shotgun. Jonathan Daniels stepped in front of Ruby taking the shotgun blast pointblank to his chest. On that doorstep that day, fear met faith, greed met hope, and hatred met love. It is when we exclude others on the basis of their difference that we develop fear and greed and hate. It is when we include the diversity that makes us all members of one human community, one body in Christ that we develop the faith, hope and love necessary to serve the world in the name of the risen one.

Julia Chester Emery, remembered on Jan 9 was a missionary. Her life is not the kind we expect in the calendar of saints, she was only 24 years of age when she was made secretary of the Woman’s Auxiliary of the Episcopal Church, an office in which she served as a faithful lay woman for 40 years. When she retired from the position in 1916, there were branches of the Woman’s Auxiliary in 66% of the 850 parishes of the Episcopal Church. The Auxiliary had funded missions and raised awareness in the larger church to the work of outreach. Mission work may involve the exotic travel and rare courage we associate with Albert Switzer and it includes the quiet dedicated persistence of mundane administration and education. Lesser Feasts and Fasts remembers Julia Emery for raising funds, organizing volunteers, administering institutions, and educating lay member of the church for which her only training was a willingness to try.

The saints remind us that Jesus' declaration of blessing on those who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who are meek, who thirst for righteousness, will be filled. Blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are you even when rejected or injured for the sake of the kingdom, for you have a place in heaven, in the embrace of God.

All Saints Collect:

Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord: Give us grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, One God, in glory everlasting. Amen.