

### Gifts from the Saints

We believe Jesus reveals to us, shows us, the fullness of God – God's love, mercy, forgiveness, justice. Jesus shows us that God is present in our lives and in our world day by day through the power of the Holy Spirit. We also believe that Jesus is fully human; he experienced everything we experience (except as a man, he could not experience childbirth, but we know of his love and his concern for children and that he told his disciples, "If you want to enter the Kingdom of God, you must become like a child.") Jesus experienced human love, relationships, childhood, adolescence, finding a career, working, making hard decisions, leaving his family, laughing, crying, experiencing pain, evil and physical death.

Jesus' divinity and humanity combine in his most concentrated teaching at the beginning of his ministry. In Luke, we read how Jesus went to a "level place" (6:17), a huge field, and taught his disciples and "a great multitude." In Matthew, Jesus goes "up the mountain" (5:1) and teaches. The Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7 of Matthew's Gospel is one, continuous teaching. In Luke, the teaching is spread through many chapters. Luke also lists a series of "woes," warnings in the style of the Old Testament. Choose the blessings and live; follow the warnings and life will be difficult.

Each year, in the season of All Saints, we read from either Luke or Matthew. We are reminded of the famous saints through history who have tried to follow this teaching; Saints with the capital "S" – Mary, John, Peter, Paul, Francis. Yet in the letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes to the saints, small "s," the church, and encourages them to follow Jesus, to be his Body in the world. We, too, are saints, little "s." We, too, are called to follow Jesus. And today, when we baptize Reagan (at 9 a.m.), we make our newest saint. We pray that her parents, godmothers, older brother, and her parish will help her with her journey as one of Jesus' saints; those who we just sang about ("I sing a song of the saints of God") "... just folk like me... and I mean to be one too..."

Last September, Pope Francis and the Roman Catholic Church proclaimed the newest Saint, with a capital "S," Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who died in 1997 after serving in India and winning the Nobel Peace prize in 1979. I was serving in Boston in the early 80's when she came to Boston to speak at Harvard.<sup>1</sup> I remember our Rector, who had come from Scotland, Richard Hallaway, remarking that "Mother Teresa is so holy that she is revered even at Harvard!"

At the age of 18, Teresa left her home in Albania and went to an Irish convent to learn to speak English so she could be a missionary nun. A year later, in 1929, she went to India and began a ministry of teaching children. After teaching more than 20 years, she decided to devote her attention to the poorest of the poor, those dying in the streets, homeless, with the worst diseases – leprosy and, later, AIDS. She started a small hospice in Calcutta with a couple of other sisters. Forty-seven years later, by the time she dies, there were over 4,000 women in her order, the Missionaries of Charity, in more than 610 missions, spread over 123 countries.

My 3 favorite stories about Mother Teresa include her quote that she is just “a tiny little pencil in the hand of God, who is writing a love letter to the world.”

And, once a patient in one of her hospices was interviewed and asked “What has been the most significant part of your time with Mother Teresa?” The patient answered, “For most of my life I have lived as an animal in the streets, people have looked at me and treated me like an animal. Mother Teresa and her sisters have cared for me like an angel. I am their angel.”

Just recently, I read a story about an Episcopal woman from Pennsylvania who traveled to India to work with Mother Teresa in Calcutta. This woman didn't realize what she was getting into. When she was trying to care for a homeless person brought in off the streets, Mother Teresa watched from the doorway. She saw this woman's discomfort, her reluctance, her difficulty in finding a proper, sensitive way to care for this filthy, sick street person. Teresa came over and took the hand of the volunteer, and touching her 5 fingers one by one, Teresa said to her, “We... do... it... for ... Jesus.” She then closed her hand into a fist, and said, “You have all you need right here.”

Saint Paul in his letter to the Ephesians lists the gifts that Mother Teresa and all the Saints, capital “S,” have shared with us: wisdom/insight, hopes, riches (a spiritual wealth rather than material possessions), and power (a power based on love, the love of Jesus from the cross, not found in control or status). I would add one more, joy. In all the saints, we see joy.

At Grace Church, our season of the saints moves into our season of stewardship and our season of Thanksgiving, with our national holiday, Thanksgiving, just over 2 weeks away. Today we'll bring up at the offertory our gifts, our pledges, weekly donations, contributions of money. These represent the gifts we share as the saints of Grace Church. Our financial support of our ministries are gifts of thanksgiving for all God has given to us. In the Eucharist, we give thanks specifically for Jesus. As you come forward today, as you support Grace Church in the months and years ahead, remember all the gifts we've received from God, from the saints in the past. And remember Mother Teresa's words, holding the hand and fingers of a reluctant volunteer, “We do it for Jesus.”

1. June 10, 1982 at Harvard as Class Day guest speaker