

Sermons at Christ Church

Be a Joyful Gift to Others.

All Saints Sunday

Rev. Emmanuel Mercer

“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.”

Children of the living God. Life gets better by knowing who you are and whose you are—a beloved child of God. And the gift of being a child of God springs solely out of the love of God. The God who gave himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ. God’s son who came to us as a child and was betrayed by people like you and me can only remain credible because of saints like you and me.

See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of the most-high God, and that is what we are. It is a privilege and we can be no other. And it appears that our betrayal and crucifixion of Jesus wasn’t sufficient enough for God to turn His back on us. We are still special to God, because God loves us as his children and looks at us like how a parent looks at the child, just like the way you look at a child and how a child looks at you.

Indeed, a child may look at the parent and think they are superman or superwoman because you make them feel special, you make them laugh, provide comfort, solace and some direction. You do all of that because you love them.

But what happens when the parent suddenly disappears or as a child you see your parents being killed or looking on helplessly while they are tortured. How would it feel when as a child you are deprived of the hands of comfort you have come to know so well? I wonder how the children of Israel whose parents were brutally killed or abducted in their presence on October 7 do feel. I wonder how the children in Gaza and Israel feel, hearing the sound of bombs drop down on them. I wonder how it feels like to know that your parents are not superman or superwoman after all because they cannot protect you.

There's a story of six year-old Charles Mulli who woke up one morning in his parent's hut to realize that his parents have abandoned him. What happened? Where did they go? Where are the hands that fed me and provided me with comfort? As a child, Charles was forced to beg from hut to hut in search of food. He scraped out a meagre existence while trying to come to terms with his abusive past. But then something happened to Charles, and he became very successful and wealthy.

But one problem that he saw was the increasing number of street children. Being one who was abandoned, he was unable to close his heart, ears, eyes and mind to the cries of these children. These were cries that he understood so well because he had cried those cries as a child.

Charles decided to sell everything he had to help the poor. This was a man with a wife and children. This decision was so counter-intuitive to his friends that they began to ostracize him.

Charles' only weapon was his relationship with God. Charles only weapon was his reliance and need for God. Remember, it is saints who make God credible. And with his family, Charles rescues street children from the slums of Kenya and provide them with the hope of new life. Saints bring life to the other.

When Jesus pronounces blessing on those who are poor in spirit, he is not talking about people who think they have no need for God because they are satisfied with the illusion of their own self-sufficiency. Jesus is talking about people like Charles who recognize their own need for God. More than that, they know that God invites each of us into a special relationship, a special bond where our gift is to make another fully alive, where we become servants of one another, where each of us is given something which is necessary for the life of all.

See what love the father has given us, that we should be called children of God. When John refers to us as children of God, John is inviting the desire to will like a child of God, to hope like a child of God, to seek mercy like a child of God, to seek peace like a child of God and to seek justice like a child of God-it is in fact to be a saint.

I want to share a story of Mother Maria of France. Maria was born in Latvia, twice married and twice divorced and had children. She later took vows and became a nun. During the Second World War, with the Nazis seeking Jews in Paris, she ran a home that took in many Jewish refugees, protected them and led them to safety from the Nazi Army.

She was arrested and eventually died at Ravensbruck concentration camp. Although the nature of her death is a bit sketchy, she stood for God's radical welcome in the midst of hatred toward Jews.

When Jesus pronounces blessings on those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, he is talking about people like Maria sacrifice their lives for those who cannot defend themselves. People sacrifice their lives for others because it is these acts that they make God credible.

Her work resembles that of many of our parishioners who have toiled in unbelievable ways to offer safety and comfort to a refugee family from Afghanistan. Some of the wonderings of our Afghan refugee family are, why do you do what you do? Why are you Christians helping us-Moslems? Yes, that's how you make God credible.

Our tragedy is that the sort of hatred that gave rise to the terrorist violence in Israel, the scourge of anti-Semitism which makes our Jewish brothers and sisters feel like they don't belong in God's creation didn't stop with the death of Sister Maria of France.

In fact our attitude towards our Jewish brothers and sisters remind me of a story of a biker who was riding along a California beach when suddenly the sky clouded above his head and in a booming voice, the Lord said, "Because you have tried to be faithful to me in all ways, I will grant you one wish."

The biker pulled over and said, "Build a bridge to Hawaii so I can ride over anytime I want." The Lord said, "Your request is materialistic, think of the enormous challenges for that kind of undertaking. The supports required to reach the bottom of the Pacific, the concrete and steel it would take! It will exhaust several natural resources. I can do it but it is hard for me to justify your desires for worldly things. Take a little more time and think of something that would honor and glorify me."

The biker thought about it for a long time. Finally he said, "Lord I wish that I could understand my wife. I want to know how she feels inside, what she is thinking when she gives me the silent treatment, why she cries, what she means when she says nothing's wrong, and how I can make a woman truly happy."

The Lord replied, "Do you want two lanes or four lanes on that bridge to Hawaii?"

It is less challenging for God to build a bridge from California to Hawaii than to change the dynamics of the relationship between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Jomo Kenyatta a onetime president of Kenya once said "Our children may learn about the heroes of the past. Our task is to make ourselves the architects of the future." We are architects of God's future because we make God credible. It is not by our words but it is by our deeds of faithfulness, mercy, kindness, mercy, justice and grace. We don't find sufficiency in ourselves but in God. We make God credible with our love-you will know they are Christians by their love.

My beloved, saints do abound and they are those whose acts of righteousness is not only centered on the acknowledgment of their own limitations, but rather the recognition that God has invited them into a fellowship of love-in spite of who they are.

Today, you and I are invited to be architects of God's future with our gifts. They are blessings that we have received as children of God. And we offer these gifts in gratitude to God, solely because we profoundly believe that each is giving something which is necessary for the life of all. More than that, we believe that it is through these acts of righteousness that we make God credible.

As Christians, if we believe that we are architects of God's future, then we are to present our lives as a template upon which new saints could spring up. I am looking for the next Charles Mulli. I am looking for the next Maria of France. I am looking at you, and thinking what a blessing it is to have you worship here today. You are my next saint.

Not because you are perfect, far from that. But it is because like anyone of us, you have accepted God's invitation to be in fellowship with God and others, you have accepted God's invitation to create a community of belonging, you have accepted God's invitation to believe that each of us is as much a child of God as you are. You have accepted God's invitation to make God credible.

Remember, as children of God and saints of God, it is only through our acts of selfless giving that we can make God credible. May we never grow weary in pursuing this noble and faithful task.

Amen.