

CEC All Saints, 2011

If I asked all of you to dress up as your favorite saint for Halloween, what would you do? Where would you go for your costume or for your inspiration.

I suppose you could take your cue from the depictions of the saints as we see them in the windows around us, flowing robes and halos or something that looks like the way we think people dressed in Jesus' day.

Do you ever take a good look at these windows, or have they become part of the wallpaper, so to speak? Did you know that this chapel, originally added to the church in 1903, was redecorated and reconsecrated on All Saints Day in 1945, effectively making it All Saints Chapel?

So who do we have as witnesses, as examples of the faith?

Eunice, mother of Timothy, noted by Paul for her piety and faith

Anna, the aged Hebrew prophetess who testifies to the infant Jesus as the messiah

Ruth, the outsider ancestor of Jesus, a symbol of trust in the goodness of God

Dorcas, a follower of Jesus and a woman of good works who may have been a deacon

Peter and Cornelius: one the fisherman apostle, the other a devout but Roman military officer; together it's a story of God's acceptance of all people

And above the altar, Christ the Great Physician, healing infirmities of all kinds:

the worker, toiling with his load; the black youth, ensnared by prejudice;

the returning wounded soldier, the mourning mother

And all, like the bent over woman from Luke who is featured in the center,

looking for relief from Christ and giving glory to God for their healing.

Every week these biblical personages surround us and inform our faith, giving us their example and calling us to do the same.

Do you think that's enough for costume possibilities?

I propose we could get even a little more creative than that.

Have you ever heard of a hagiography?

That's a book with the official stories of the saints approved by the church.

It means, literally, "holy story."

We have such a book in the Episcopal Church; for nearly every day of the year it recognizes and tells the story of good Christian men and women across history.

In older editions it was called *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*,

in its most current version it is *Holy Women, Holy Men*.

I like this change of title; it seems much clearer as to purpose,

because the Episcopal Church does not canonize individuals as the Roman Church does.

I mean, there is no official process of "making" someone a saint.

Rather, we hold that all baptized Christians are saints of God

and all have the potential to be examples of faith to others.

Thus the names on the walls around us today.

Episcopalians pray for each other and for all Christians

as members of the Communion of Saints,

including both the living and the dead, since all are in the hands of God.

This sermon was written by The Rev. Theo Park and delivered at Christ Episcopal Church, Red Wing. Fr. Theo thanks all those whose material he has borrowed and apologizes to those he has overlooked.

With this understanding, *Holy Women, Holy Men* covers a wide variety of Christians from various denominations and traditions and from all walks of life.

So if we dip into it for costume suggestions, how about dressing as an old worn-down woman with scars from beatings by cruel overseers?

This would be Sojourner Truth, a saint who gained freedom from slavery and preached the gospel of liberation to a prejudiced generation.

How about wearing a plain white shirt with a stethoscope and a big white handlebar mustache?

This would be Albert Schweitzer, a saint who spent his life as a missionary and doctor in Africa, even though he could have remained in Europe, living in luxury and fame.

Or you could put on the starched apron and cap of a 19th century battlefield nurse.

This would be Florence Nightingale, a saint who revolutionized modern nursing with high standards of hospital sanitation and professional education for nurses.

Why not dress in a black suit and simple tie, with dark hair, carrying a Bible?

This would be Jonathan Myrick Daniels, a young seminarian and saint who at 26 gave his life trying to end racial discrimination in America.

As the old hymn puts it:

“For the saints of God are just folk like me, and I mean to be one too.”

This is, of course, my point here,

and it is more important than how children or adults costume themselves on Halloween:

understanding that we can become saints too, can be faithful disciples of Christ,

following the saints of old or the saints of today who show us the way.

We don't have to look only at the saints in stained glass, in other words.

All Saints' Day celebrates all those whose good examples

remind us of what we can be at our best,

remind us of who we are, what we believe, and what we can become.

They draw us forward, give us courage,

strengthen us to do God's will, and lead the way.

I have a sort of private hagiography, by the way,

a personal version of *Holy Women, Holy Men*.

It is filled with the images of inspirational lives; men and women, old and young.

None of them are perfect people, mind you,

but they are all beautiful examples of God reaching out to the world through us with grace and love and care.

Shall I share it with you?

You might be surprised to recognize some of these saints;

you might never have thought of them...or yourselves...as saints.

But God does...and I do.

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All Saints' Day is a time when
looking at the good examples of those who have come before us,
of those who surround us here, in the windows and in the pews,
can enable us to think beyond our limitations
and to believe that each of us has the potential to respond to God's gracious love
with active love for others and with commitment and caring and giving.
The saints lead us into the fullness of life that God intends for us all.

May you know that true joy and fullness this All Saints and every day.
and may you live in such a way as to be an inspiration to others.