

“Your Life Matters!”

Today is the Feast of All Saints; or, more simply, All Saints' Day. And in case you were wondering what feast days are all about, apparently, if you go back in time far enough, the word “feast” shares a common root as the modern Spanish word “fiesta.” Having said that, I'll let you connect the dots.

In any event, I'm particularly fond of All Saints' Day because for me it's like the feast day for the rest of us.

I'll explain.

If you were to take one of those red Prayer Books from its pew rack, and open it to books in the pew racks in front of you — it's our *Book of Common Prayer* — and starting at page 19, there you would find the calendar and roster of “official” saints for The Episcopal Church, and the days on which we honor them.

And the reason they are saints is because they were people of faith who did an exceptionally good job of living the sorts of lives that God has called all of us to live. And in many of those cases, they did so despite having to deal with significant challenges and obstacles. And so, for that reason we remember them. And we hold them up as examples of godly living. And, hopefully, we learn from them and try to emulate them.

However, not all saints get to have their own day on a calendar. Rather, they are simply part of that “great cloud of witnesses” whom we remember on this day.

Now, when I use that term “witnesses” to describe all those other saints, I don't mean to suggest that they are hovering around and watching us, because that would be kind of creepy, wouldn't it? Instead, these are those men and women and children who hover at the fringes of our memory, and whose lives — whose actions and decisions — bears witness to the sort of people they chose to be. And they linger in our memories because their lives were somehow uniquely meaningful to us; because in their lives we saw the spark of something unique and precious. And even if no one else noticed it, we did.

All Saints' Day is for them.

Now, traditionally, All Saints' Day was intended as a day to remember those who had died. But lately, and I think appropriately, it has come to include some who are still alive. And I've really grown to appreciate that trend, because it sends the message that, even while we are still alive, our lives can be meaningful and valuable; that what we do can make a difference; and that who we are and what we stand for can count for something. But especially because it underscores the message that *every human life matters!*

I've recently come to realize that one of the people on my ever-growing list of saints was a man I knew back in Kansas. His name was Chuck Werly and he was one of the nicest and sweetest people I have ever known. He was a smart and creative person of faith. He was very active at the church I served and, after about 15 years of enjoying his friendship, and when Chuck was in his 70s, I had the honor of presiding at his funeral.

But one of the unique things about Chuck was the fact that he died an old bachelor. And I think it was because he was gay; he never actually came out and said it, and I think he would have denied it if I had asked. But it was clear to me that, at some point in his early life — perhaps through his family, or even through his church — Chuck got the message that being gay was bad. Really, *really* bad. And so he spent a big chunk of his long life really at odds with a significant part of who he was. And even though we had a lot of oblique conversations about the topic of homosexuality — they were oblique because Chuck would never have discussed it directly with me — I don't think I was all that persuasive for him. It was really *such* a tragedy!

And yet, despite all that — despite what I imagine was an incredible burden to live with — Chuck was one of the best people I ever knew. The Light of Christ really shone through that man. And now he's one of my saints.

And that's the thing about All Saints' Day — it's the feast day “for the rest of us.”

For all of us who've been told that we're not good enough, or that we're weird, or that we're an “abomination”;

For all of us who've been told that we're unattractive, unappealing, or undesirable;

For all of us who've been rejected, snubbed, spurned, or ignored;

For all of us who've been told that we're stupid or wouldn't amount to anything;

For all of us who've ever thought "If they knew *that* about me, they wouldn't want to be my friend";

For all of us who have been straining under such burdens, and yet somehow managed to cope with all that baggage and live lives that are meaningful, satisfying, and fulfilling — and by our example help others to do the same — and who have striven to live lives modeled after the Golden Rule and the twin commandments that we love God and neighbor; For all of us, All Saints' Day proclaims, "Despite all that junk, which others have foisted on you, your life can still make a difference, because, in God's opinion, your life matters."

Maybe this is a part of what Jesus had in mind when he said,

"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."
(Matthew 11: 28-30, New Living Translation).

And so, on this All Saints' Day, while we're remembering, and giving thanks, for all those other people — dead *and* alive — whose lives made a difference for us; we might want to pause for a moment and consider the very real possibility that someone somewhere is remembering us, and giving thanks to God for us!

Because today is All Saints' Day; the feast day for *all* the rest of us.

Amen.