

**Sermon for the Feast of All Saints, 2019**  
**Church of Reconciliation, San Antonio**  
**The Rev. Judith L. Rhodes**

*Singing Is What Saints Do!*

Truth be told, the Feast of All Saints is one of my favorite feast days of the entire liturgical year. And the lessons are ones that make my heart sing. In fact, from the very first reading from the Book of Revelation, we “hear” the saints singing. Why, yes, singing is what saints do! Singing is what I believe, “saints who are in the process of being sanctified” (oh, that would be you and I) are called to sing! Thankfully, here at Church of Reconciliation, singing is what we do so much of during our (10:30am) Sunday celebration of Holy Eucharist. Singing, it is said, is praying twice. I certainly believe it is, and more!

I grew up in a family who loved to sing and loved to dance. My grandmother was one of those amazingly gifted people who could simply hear a piece of music and without a lot of trouble, she could sit and play it at the piano. I have so many cherished memories of childhood sitting and singing at the piano, in a children’s choir, in a high school choir and a college acapella group (or as my once very young daughter would say, an ‘acapulco’ group). You see, whether you think you can sing or not, doesn’t matter... we are all created with a song in our hearts to sing. Whether there is harmony or not, singing as prayer and praise is always a joyful noise!

The vision of the great multitude of saints from every nation is a breathtaking one. Wearing white robes and carrying palm branches in their hands, these are the persecuted and martyred ones, the ones who have come out of the great ordeal. These are the ones who are surrounded by the angels, who fall on their faces worshipping God, and sing! *Singing is what saints do. Singing is what saints in the making are called to do, as well.* Singing the praises of an all merciful, all loving, all forgiving God who calls us each to sainthood, to membership in the communion of saints in heaven and on earth.

Growing up Roman Catholic as a little girl, I loved to read the stories of the saints. And the truth of the matter was that although I wished I could be a saint, the stories of the young girls and women who were martyred, well, didn’t really thrill me. Butler’s Book of the Lives of the Saints after all, would never include someone like me. Of that I was certain.

What about you? What is your earliest recognition of saints of the church? Was there ever one whose story captivated your imagination? Or still does?

How wonderful that in the Episcopal Church our understanding of saints has truly evolved. Just pick up the volume, *Holy Women, Holy Me: Celebrating the Saints...* and read through it. This book is a testimony to the witness of countless diverse men and women whose lives reflect the love of God, whose witness in the face of many challenges and ordeals is a message of new life. These holy women and holy men, whose works and words of compassion, forgiveness, healing and hope lay claim to the truth of our faith, that death in whatever form it comes, never has the last word.

And as I am now much older and somewhat wiser, ***I understand the call to be a saint is not a matter of ultimate perfection, it is a matter of ultimate surrender***, even one hesitant step at a time. The call to be a saint, is given to us in our Baptism, to die and to rise with Christ, marked as Christ's own forever. Well, I think that's a pretty perfect definition of a saint. ***One whose whole life is oriented to Christ, marked, as an imprimatur on one's soul as forever belonging to Christ.***

I love this text from Revelation as salvation is extended to ***all-*** from every race and tribe, from every people, race, and nation. Salvation is the unearned gift from God. And so the throng too many to count, sing. Salvation is God's gift, and never ours to withhold or deem any one, unworthy.

*Just imagine, this vast multitude singing, and then they hear the elders and the angels sing in response, "Amen! Blessing, and glory, and wisdom and thanksgiving, and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen."* And the saints, listen.

One commentator I read this week wrote: "Even in the midst of evil, war, social upheaval, famine, luxury, and greed, saints cannot keep from singing! Though sickness, death, persecution, hurricane, tornado, earthquake, fire, and state sanctioned injustice, saints cannot keep from listening. Why? Because by listening they hear the good news. Living between the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, saints hear the raucously beautiful good news of God's final word reaching back through history... By singing they pay it forward and proclaim salvation loudly. They sing for the courage to live in the

present while always facing the future. There is no silence in this vision, for no one can keep from singing or listening to the good news of salvation meant for all.” (Feasting on the Word)

Like the vision before us from the Book of Revelation, you and I stand here together, in a beautiful sanctuary surrounded by the beauty of God’s creation, a vision of the Kin-dom all around us, within us and about us. You and I are called to be the singers of the song of salvation for all God’s creatures, for all God’s creation. You and I are called to proclaim even in the midst of threat, disaster, disease or even death, “How can I keep from singing?” ... The Divine is in the midst of us in all times and seasons, promising us as in this vision:

*They will hunger no more, and thirst no more;  
the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat;  
for the Lamb at the center will be their shepherd, and  
he will guide them to the springs of the water of life,  
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*

This vision is for every one! And the Book of Revelation was written to be a source of comfort. It is a text that demands a willingness on the part of the reader **and** the hearer to give oneself over to spiritual imagination while at the same time, trusting in the power and the truth of its underlying message- *the radical inclusivity of God.*

The great multitude includes all sorts and conditions of humanity- Jew and Gentile, male and female, African and Greek- to whom belong the gift of God’s salvation. This proclamation is an important one for us to listen to again and again in our own context: This proclamation presumably includes the recognition that salvation does not belong to any one of the nations, tribes, peoples or languages (including religious languages.) God’s message of salvation is for all, not for only those we deem worthy.

One more detail that perhaps is often overlooked in the text comes in response to the question of one of the elders: “*Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?*”

And the response is: “*These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white...*”

Friends, the countless ones who sing praises are those who have *washed their own robes...* these are the ones, like us, who are called to participate in God's offering of salvation for the life of the world.

Who are the ones who have taught you, inspired you, to sing? To sing even in the face of danger, or in the midst of pain? Who has invited you to a deeper understanding that the Divine calls you to participate in the very act of salvation by proclaiming the inclusive love of God to everyone you meet? Today, give thanks and give witness to others you will meet along the way!

My friends, we are the choir members going forth from this place today singing a song of love, a song of peace, a song of healing in the face of all the dangers, threats, and injustices we encounter along the way.

***How can we keep from singing? We just can't.***

So, tune up those vocal chords and give it your all... Amen.