

November 2, 2011

## All Saints Day!

**Dear Friends,**

God's blessings to you, Saints of God! As we celebrate and remember All Saints Day, we recall those who have gone before us in the faith. Our minds are drawn to those brothers and sisters who fought the good fight of faith and received the reward of their faith, now at the throne of Jesus.

As I reflect on the loved ones in my life who now rest eternally with Jesus, the words from Hebrews 12:1-2, speak loudly to me. We read,

*"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

Think of the people God has drawn into your life, even if only for a short duration, who have influenced your faith in a positive way. Think about that Sunday School teacher, or elder, the pastor, teacher, youth leader, or pew sitter, whose life and faith touched your life.

My mind is filled with memories of people from the time when I was serving a parish; people who I sat with and prayed with in their last hours before going "home" to be with Jesus. I can remember some really funny stories, some really sad stories, but mostly, I remember the people and how they touched my life, shaped me, and in some ways, continue to shape me even today, as I daily walk with Jesus. These are some from the "cloud of witnesses" that surrounds me on a regular basis, cheering me on when I begin to lag in that race of faith.

These are the ones to whom Jesus has now spoken those words we all so long to hear, *"Well done, thou good and faithful servant."* You know them in your life. Some of them may be the same for you as for me. But more likely, there are many in your life that are unknown to any of us. Yet, day after day, they are there, surrounding us, encouraging us, providing



Rev. Gregory S. Walton  
FLGA District President

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a shining example of a Christ-like life.

One such saint in my life was St. Phil. He was a friend and a member of my congregation who died in an untimely accident. He was a born evangelist, and probably never knew a stranger. Ironically, he had worked for the phone company, and he was always on the phone. He called himself my worship czar, and was always at the church early on Sunday to make sure everything was in order and that I had what I needed.

What I remember most about Phil was how he so naturally shared his faith in Jesus. It was not something he did, but rather, who he was. His smile, even in the face of persecution, showed the love and grace of Jesus.

It was about 12 years ago that Phil was out trimming trees in his yard in a rented bucket lift. He had about six men from the congregation working with him. Always confident, Phil had strapped himself in the bucket, cut a large limb which hit the bucket and bounced him out and he fell to the ground. Later, as I sat with his wife at the hospital, she said, "I know Phil. If he had a choice when he was to meet Jesus I'm pretty sure he would have smiled and said, 'I love you, honey, but I'm going with Jesus!'" The Psalmist says, "*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints!*" This was a precious day!

The day of Phil's funeral he was supposed to sing a solo at a wedding I had scheduled, so instead of listening to him sing to the wedding couple, I sang in honor of Phil at one of the most uplifting funerals I've ever done. I believe his confirmation verse was the familiar Revelation 2:10, "*Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*" I'm convinced that Phil is part of that cloud of witnesses in my life that continues to teach me as I remember his life and ministry. He's wearing that crown, and I'm confident that my former worship czar has one shined up for me!

What Phil couldn't do is give me that crown. It wasn't his to give. That crown comes from Jesus alone, who on the cross canceled the debt of my sin with His own blood. It's mine by grace through faith alone. Yet, Phil's faith life made the love and grace of Jesus more real for me, and helped me understand that somehow walking with Jesus was possible, even in the face of struggle. So as I think about All Saints Day today, I remember St. Phil and how God used him to touch my life and encourage my faith.

Who is the St. Phil in your life? A saint isn't merely someone

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who has been, or who has died in the faith. Remember how I began this! YOU are a saint! So who has God brought into your life as an example? Maybe it's that annoying person you've avoided because they rub you the wrong way. Perhaps God is shaping you. Maybe it's that person whose name you can never remember, but who always smiles at you nonetheless. God's saints are all around us, aren't they?

However, maybe an even more important thought on this All Saints Day is whose life has God placed you in to be an example? Who needs that smile, or that comforting word of encouragement from you? You are all God's saints and witnesses for Jesus. People are watching your life. In today's world people are looking for authenticity in the lives of God's people. The only way we live like this is by doing exactly what the writer to the Hebrews said—namely fixing our eyes on Jesus!

So celebrate All Saints Day, celebrate those lives that have touched your walk in your faith in Jesus, and be the touch of Jesus in another's life for the sake of the Kingdom.

Let me close with those words from the old hymn, "Rise Up, O Saints of God!" as we reflect on our life in Jesus;

"Rise up, O saints of God! From vain ambitions turn;  
Christ rose triumphant that your hearts With nobler  
zeal might burn.

Rise up, O saints of God! His kingdom's task embrace;  
Redress sin's cruel consequence Give justice larger  
place" LSB 383

Rise up, O saints of God! Your life His witness be!  
As other lives have touched your own, let Jesus live in  
thee!

One in the crowd with you,

**Greg**

*Rev. Gregory S. Walton, President  
The Florida-Georgia District, LCMS  
7207 Monetary Drive  
Orlando, FL 32809-5753  
407-857-5556 (ext. 8)  
877-457-5556 (ext. 8)*

407-857-5665 (FAX)  
[gwalton@flqa-lcms.org](mailto:gwalton@flqa-lcms.org)  
[www.flqa-lcms.org](http://www.flqa-lcms.org)

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