

Sermon for All Saint's Sunday**Matthew 5:1-12****November 6, 2011**

Olga never talked. Day after day she sat in her wheelchair in the nursing home, near the nurse's station, and out of everyone's way. Olga never gave the aides any trouble. I know, because she was often one of my women to care for when I worked there. It was said that something had happened to her, something that has caused her such enormous grief that she never spoke again. The doctors said there was nothing physically wrong with her, and that she should be capable of speech, but Olga never made a sound. Never. Her features were absolutely immobile. Cold or heat, pain or pleasure, pea soup or turkey – nothing ever seemed to matter to her, nothing could break her rock-solid face, into either laughter or tears. We used to wonder what it was that had caused her such desperate pain – a husband's faithlessness, a child's death, a mother's abandonment. All we could do was wonder because no one ever came to visit her. No one. Not ever. As I brushed her long grey hair one day, I noticed the only jewelry she had, the only interesting piece in her otherwise drab, hand-me-

down wardrobe. It was a small gold cross, which hung around her thick neck, and which she would occasionally raise a hand to finger. And Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Across the ocean and many centuries before Olga had been born, there lived another woman. Perpetua was a young mother, with her only child but a few days old when the soldiers came and took her to prison. With her went her friend and servant, Felicity, herself heavy with child, and soon to be delivered. It was a crime in their country to confess the name of Jesus as Lord, and so they were imprisoned. It was assumed that two young mothers would not long endure the harsh life of prison and would soon see reason, renouncing their ridiculous faith in the preacher from Galilee who went and got himself crucified. But they did not, and so they were condemned to be torn by maddened beasts in the arena. Felicity’s baby was born the day before the sentence was to be carried out. Together the two young women, one of them black, one of them white, each only 17 years old, were lead into the ring. They were gored repeatedly, and finally, mercifully, they were beheaded. And Jesus said,

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

After Perpetua and Felicity but before Olga, there lived a carefree rich boy named John, whose parents gave him anything and everything he wanted. John was spoiled rotten. He went gaily off to his country's wars, to do his duty and become the hero he had always dreamed of being. But the war changed him, and when he came home, he was a broken man, and his family and friends barely knew him. He didn't care about taking over the family business or about the wealth his father had made from the war. He spent his time out in the fields, listening to birds and smelling flowers, and the people in town said he was crazy. He lived the rest of life as a poor man, never owning more than the clothes he worn. He is remembered today as a friend of animals and the poor, and is called by the nickname his mother used – Francis, Francis of Assisi. And Jesus said, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

Three true stories of saints. Some of them you have maybe heard of before, like St. Francis. Some, like Olga, it seemed no one knew. Each of these, and millions more

besides are those we call the saints of God, those who have been our ancestors in the faith, and who we honor today. On this Sunday of All Saints, we look around us to see the circle of the blessed who surround with their faith. Most of them are ordinary people, whose voice and touch became at times for us the voice and touch of God - a friend, perhaps, or a neighbor, or a mother or father, a grandmother or grandfather, someone whose life sometimes reflected God's love to us. Oh, they were not perfect; far from it. Whoever they were for you, they were most certainly human, and sometimes we loved them and other times they may have been harder to love. Saints are not perfect people, because there are no perfect people. Saints are only those very imperfect people through whom God's love and light shines.

So, who are you remembering this All Saint's Sunday? Today I remember my mom and dad, my grandparents, my mother and father-in-law, and some good friends. You have your own list of those you miss today, those who have left a hole in your heart that never quite fills in. Today we gently and reverently take out the memories of those we love, those who rest now in the

arms of Jesus. And Jesus said, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

Remember that you get to be a saint to someone else. You are the person someone looks to, to be the light and love of God for them. No matter what you may have done, or had done to you, you are God's beloved child. No matter where you have been or where you may go, God will be there with you. No matter what you may said, or have had said to you, God will never abandon you. You are God's saint, you are God's Beloved, and you are God's blessing. For Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they – for you, dear saints – shall see God.”

AMEN