

Saintly Living

‘[Early in the last century] there were two churches in a [small] community, a Methodist church and a Baptist church. The Baptists were temporarily without a pastor when a church deacon died. The family asked the Methodist pastor if he would conduct the funeral service. This was the Methodist pastor’s first year in the ministry, and he felt he needed approval from the bishop of the area. So he sent a telegram asking, “May I have approval to bury a Baptist deacon?” The bishop quickly replied with a telegram that read, “Bury all the Baptists you can!”’

Apparently that Methodist bishop saw an opening here to expand the numbers and prestige of the Methodist church, at the expense of the, presumably, despised Baptists. Convert as many Baptists to Methodism as possible, to make the world that much more a better place! We’re not Methodists in this room, but we like them, don’t we? After all, Rev. Secoy was and is a Methodist. And we all like him and Naomi. Or is he just an exception? When what we really want is for all the world to become good Lutherans? Well, that’s never going to happen! I can guarantee it.

We’re gathered here today on All Saints’ Sunday. It’s also the global International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. Odd how well those two observances dovetail with each other,

isn't it? And then, next Sunday, when we bring our Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes to pray God's blessing on them that they may find their way somewhere in the world into the hands of children who will be blessed by them, and guided into the saving and ecstatic relationship with Christ Jesus. And there are no church denominations favored one over another in any of that work. As well there must not be. The only requirement is that churches believe that the Bible is, in its entirety, the inerrant Word of God. That means, of course, they can sincerely affirm in full every word of the Apostles' Creed. If they can, then they are Christians. Despite whatever inaccuracies or strange idiosyncrasies they might also practice. Whatever we might feel is wrong with certain points of their doctrine or theology, if it's not in major conflict with the whole of the Bible's teaching, then we must not allow such "finer" points to divide us from fellowship with each other.

In II Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul has hurriedly written a letter to refute some major "fake news". A letter was sent to them, supposedly from Paul, and presumably to some other churches as well, that was a forgery. Demons motivated people to issue a letter filled with distortions, half truths, and outright lies, in order to lead people away from true faith, away from Christ, and ultimately, into hell. (And we think that we today are the first to be subject to a continual barrage of lies, misinformation, disinformation and fake news spewed forth from the old "mainstream" media.) Parroting the distortions, deceptions and duplicity of politicians, bu-

reaucratic personnel, and paid pundits on the take, the media is now so filled with lies, there's hardly anything published that can be taken at face value. And so, particularly when it comes to voting, voters must be oh so very careful and very well informed to know the actual effects of the election of this candidate verses that one, and an affirmative vote for one proposition as opposed to a negative one. I had occasion to visit a local DMV the other day. And the parade of humanity in and out of that office was discouraging indeed. To think that such under-educated and under-informed people cast ballots that affect all our livelihoods is disheartening indeed. Such an observation should hardly be surprising given that huge sections of our citizenry now no longer can even recognize what is true verses what is false. They've blindly allowed themselves to fall under the influence of demons!

And I suppose it shouldn't raise any eyebrows that such idiocy has infected much of the Church as well. We've been so comfortable, rich and relaxed, in the American church, that we've kept on doing our own thing while the culture around us has moved on and so far away that many of them now consider Christians the most vile people on earth. Fascists, terrorists, and racists we're now called. And we find that persecution against us is rising, even in formerly Christian America. We've been going through the motions, practically mindlessly, that it's no wonder that hardly anyone cares what we think anymore. Much like the state of the Jews in Malachi's time, shortly before the Greeks took

over. Malachi was the last of the Biblical prophets before our Lord Jesus arrived, some four and a half centuries later. And the Lord God found the people, literally going through the motions of worshipping God. They were so uninterested in God that their offerings were quite literally shameful. And yet, it was all good enough. “Why, God should be “grateful” that we even give Him anything at all!” was the private mindset of most of the people. If you were God then, and even now, what would you think?

Was it any different when Lord Jesus came? We’re told in the Gospel accounts that the Pharisees and Sadducees were, as a whole, totally unimpressed with Him. So set in their ways they were that there was literally nothing He could do to change their minds, wake them up, open their eyes to see the truth that was staring at them in the face, and had been for centuries! Their minds were closed, like tight fists, such that hardly any of them could even imagine that they could be wrong about anything. But they did come to realize that despite everything, they couldn’t trick Him into saying anything they could use to entrap Him. He was, to them, a clever “devil” indeed!

Yet not all of them were as blockheaded. They were all intelligent, well-educated people. While most of them became blinded by their own elitist prejudices, a few remained open to see the plain truth being presented to them. Those few eventually stood up, went against the flow, cast their lot with Christ Jesus, and became His followers. They actually became “saints”. On All Saints’

Day, the church has traditionally celebrated those officially designated as “saints” by the ancient church authorities; people who led extraordinarily “holy” lives, and were used by Holy Spirit to perform miracles for other people. But according to numerous scriptures in both the Old and New Testaments, all believers are, by definition, saints. And to be a saint means to be one of God’s holy people. So I ask you, how saintly have you been lately? Or, are you feeling holy today? No? Why not? Is it something you did, or said? Truly, all true believers are saints, are holy, by the singular virtue that they have been covered with the most holy shed blood of the Savior of the Universe, Christ Jesus.

I think we can all agree, however, that there must be something visible that can identify us as saints, as opposed to just “nice, proper” people. Among many other places, basically the whole first half of Ephesians 5 describes how saints need to behave in order to live out their sainthood: “Imitate God, ... Live a life filled with love, ... Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. ... Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. ... Don’t participate in the things [immoral, impure, greedy] people do, ... live as people of light! ... Carefully determine what pleases the Lord. Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness ... So be careful how you live. Don’t live like fools, but like those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. Don’t act thoughtlessly, but understand what the

Lord wants you to do. Don't be drunk with wine, ... Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs ... making music to the Lord in your hearts. And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Does that list accurately reflect your life? Why, or why not? What do you need to do? You absolutely need to keep focussed on what you're thinking and doing; who you're following.

A well-known black televangelist Creflo Dollar, pastor of Christian World Changers Church International in Atlanta, has lost focus and needs to be reprimanded by the rest of the Church. He welcomed Democrat Stacey Abrams to his pulpit last Sunday. If you're not familiar with Ms. Abrams, former and current candidate for Georgia governor, she refers to abortion as "reproductive justice", is a "proud LGBTQ ally", is anti religious freedom, and an activist for Critical Race Theory which claims America is systemically racist, even founded to promote slavery. Karen Hardin writes: "Sadly, what Creflo Dollar just revealed in his endorsement of Abrams is a man whose skin color determines who gets his vote rather than his relationship with Christ". Whatever future good this man may accomplish for the Kingdom of Christ is now in grave jeopardy. He needs to repent, the sooner the better. He's not living saintly, now. But the real question is, how saintly are we? Since our most righteous deeds are described as "filthy rags" in Isaiah 64:6, how can we truly be saintly? Let Holy Spirit of Christ help you, and take you to heights unknown! That's how!

