



All Saints Day, Year C – October 31, 2010

A Homily preached by the Venerable M. Ansley Tucker

For centuries, All Saints' Day has been an occasion for adding "saints" to the life of the Church by baptism. And today, it is our great joy to add Tara and Rhyd and Bryn to the company of those who have committed themselves to what the first Christians called "The Way."

I wonder if we might spend a few minutes considering what exactly we baptized have signed on for. Not so very long ago, maybe only 30 or 40 years, Christianity (at least in the West) enjoyed a kind of religious, moral and cultural hegemony, which we dubbed "Christendom." Well, my friends, Christendom is no more. Even those who would identify Christianity as their religious "preference" on a long form census are increasingly inclined to adhere to little more than a "Goldenish" Rule. Christianity in the popular imagination has been reduced to civility and goodwill. Whereas once even those who did not attend church could still tell you the basic Christian Story, no longer is this true. There are all kinds of people who can speak of a "good Samaritan," or of the "writing on the wall" or "saving the best for last," or even "the patience of Job" and never know that every one of these phrases comes to us from the bible. There is an enormous loss of "Christian memory."

Consequently we cannot count on cultural osmosis as a means of ensuring that our children, or adult inquirers, will "pick up" the fundamentals of Christian faith and practice. And so I ask again, what exactly have the baptized signed on for?

Let me share with you the role of our Coordinator of children's, youth and family ministry. When we advertised this position, we wrote a ministry description, and in it, we articulated our expectations for the "formation" of young Christians. In other words, we tried to describe just what it is we are trying to achieve amongst our children and young people.

We enumerated five points:

(1) We want people to come to age-appropriate faith, and to be knowledgeable about the things of faith. Thinking of God as some kind of celestial Santa Claus is fine for people who still believe in Santa Claus. But at some point we need to get past the idea of a God of reward and punishment, or of prayer as the submission of a list of our wants and desires. Similarly, our appreciation of the riches, and nuances, of our faith is a lifelong journey. Perhaps we begin as children by learning our "special words" - narthex, and aumbry and ewer; but in due course, surely, we must graduate to concepts - like incarnation, anamnesis, and atonement; and we must become thoroughly familiar with the Bible and our Judaeo-Christian history.

(2) We want all our members to be thoroughly inducted into the spiritual practices of the Church. These include prayer, Sunday worship, study, hospitality, and mission. I can remember as a first year divine heading off to the local Anglo-catholic parish priest, and asking him if he would please teach me to pray. I did this because I was afraid some day somebody might ask me how, and somehow I had managed to attend church every single Sunday since I turned seventeen without having learned this. This is shocking! Lucky for me, I was taught how to pray, how to meditate, how to make my confession. Lucky for me, the Dean of Divinity at Trinity College expressed his dismay that I hadn't quite got on to reading Morning

and Evening Prayer each day. (And don't forget, in those days, I was not an ordinand. I was just like everybody else in this room: a Christian called and committed to the lay state.) Lucky for me, my friend Michael Thompson blew my mind with his uncanny ability to extricate the deep wisdom of Scripture and to see it at work in even the most mundane of daily transactions. If we want our children to imbibe and inherit these spiritual practices, they are going to need to see them at work in our own lives.

(3) We want our children to learn and to be supported in their adoption of Christian values. And by this, I don't just mean love, sweetness and light. I mean values deeply rooted in the Judaeo-Christian narrative, values which may not actually seem all that desirable to people who have not committed themselves to the way of Jesus. For example, *stewardship of the environment* (we were entrusted with the wellbeing of the created order in the very first chapters of Genesis. For example, *forgiveness*. Actually choosing to let something go, without exacting your pound of flesh in the process. It's really not all that common. For example, *obligation*. In a society which is head over heels in love with "rights," the idea that we might actually have a duty, is truly radical. And so on.

(4) We want our children and youth to learn to engage in Christian mission through volunteerism and philanthropy. Throwing our money at good causes is not enough – because it allows us too much distance from human suffering, and therefore too little opportunity to learn real compassion. But neither is an investment of time alone good enough – because, despite conventional wisdom to the contrary, time is *not* money. Time doesn't buy medicine, or housing, or staff. We therefore want our children to learn to be both volunteers *and* donors. Giving (of ourselves and our resources) is just what we do – and we do it for the sake of the other, and not out of any self-interest. When Jesus gave his life, it can hardly have been because there was something in it for him!! This Jesus is our model. Which is why, for example, I was absolutely horrified this week by the hockey mom who objected to the \$100 in her son's hockey fees designated for the construction of a new arena he would never use. Excuse me?! Quite apart from the fact that I'm guessing this particular mother contributed not one penny to the rink her son *does* use, it is the sheer self-interest undergirding her view of philanthropy that runs absolutely counter to everything we believe in as Christians.

And (5) we want our young people to find a welcoming and desirable Christian community. In this we aren't just talking about great worship and friendly people. We are talking about real community (not just virtual community): about people who will be there for you when your life is in turmoil, people who will bring you a casserole when you've had a baby, or drive you to your chemotherapy appointments; people who will actually become your friends, and not just your Sunday (or Facebook) nodding acquaintances. We're talking about a community which somehow negotiates the fine line between non-judgmental acceptance and raising the bar – ever challenging us to grow in faith, in spiritual practices, in Christian values, and self-giving.

In short, Christianity is so much more than adherence to "a Goldenish Rule." It is our job as the baptized to ensure that the riches of our faith and practice are delivered intact to the next generation. If we are going to do this, we need ourselves to be deeply and authentically practised in the things that make for faith and faithfulness. Please, I beg you, remember this a moment from now, when I ask if you will support Tara, Rhyd and Bryn in their life in Christ. They're signing on for something huge. As have we.

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