



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

November 1, 2010
All Saints' Day
Barbara Green

RCL: Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18; Psalm 149; Ephesians 1:11-23; Luke 6:20-31

LM: Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14; Psalm 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12

What is the relationship between sainthood and a hungry person? Is the hungry woman, in fact, a saint? Does poverty confer sanctity? Is the helper who comes to her rescue a saint? What about bystanders who mind their own business and do not get involved?

In his various letters Paul refers to the communities of believers as “the saints.” He makes no distinction according to individual moral behavior or leadership. The only criterion for sainthood is membership in the community. We remember this day those in our parishes who have died the preceding year, and we celebrate the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us.

In the passage from Ephesians, Paul expresses gratitude for the Ephesians’ faith and for their love toward all the saints. He prays that they will receive the spirit of wisdom and revelation and have the eyes of their hearts opened to perceive the hope promised them as part of their inheritance. “The eyes of the heart” is a wonderful image for the heart’s ability to motivate compassionate response to suffering. When Jane Addams founded Hull House in Chicago, she saw the community’s needs around her with the eyes of the heart.

The Hebrew Bible reading for this day gives us a strong image of the opposite of saints. Daniel’s vision of four terrible beasts is described in vivid detail. The beasts are interpreted explicitly as four kingdoms that will sweep over Israel and cause deep suffering. These are not communities of saints but communities gone astray in power, cruelty, and hubris, clearly working against God’s intended vision of shalom for God’s people. Our contemporary challenge is to ask if our own country is acting like such a beast toward other nations and people, and if so, how we respond. Two U.S. wars against Iraq in twelve years pose that question to U.S. citizens with painful urgency.

The gospel lesson from Luke is a wide-open invitation to address issues of social and economic justice. In Luke’s Sermon on the Plain, a set of four blessings and four woes are arranged in parallel form. In stark contrast to Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount, Luke’s passage needs no mystical speculation as to what it means to be “poor in spirit” and to whom the words refer. Here clearly the material poor are blessed with the

1. Words by J. M. Neale. An excellent choir setting of the carol is in Reginald Jacques and David Willcocks, eds., *Carols for Choirs 1: Fifty Christmas Carols* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961) 34.



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

promise of God's kingdom. Those who are literally hungry are blessed with the promise that they will be filled, while those who live in over-consumption must expect a future of gnawing hunger and remorse. Those for whom blessing is foretold are asked to trust the blessing's promise, while those to whom woe is ascribed are called to listen and repent from their ways.

A beloved Christmas carol, "Good King Wenceslas," tells the story of Saint Wenceslas, Duke of Bohemia in the tenth century. He is the patron saint of the Czech people and strongly influenced the establishment of Christianity in Bohemia. As a child, Wenceslas was influenced by his grandmother Ludmila and educated in Slavonic reading and writing by her priest, Paul, who in turn had been educated by the Greek missionaries Cyril and Methodius. At one time Wenceslas considered going to Rome and dedicating himself to the religious life. But he stayed in Bohemia until his death, gathering a reputation as a Christian leader of compassion and high moral character. Wenceslas was murdered in front of the door to the church of Saints Cosmas and Damian. He is not remembered for the power struggles he waged or the opulence of his privileged life; rather, he is revered for his compassion for those who were poor and hungry, said to be so compelling to those around him that "Heat was in the very sod which the saint had printed." The carol concludes: "Therefore, Christian men, be sure, wealth or rank possessing, / You who now will bless the poor shall yourselves find blessing."¹

Children's Time

Ask the children to think of the nicest people they know and say who they are. What makes them so nice? Are they kind? Do they help other people? Do they share food? Tell them that sometimes we call that kind of person a "saint," but actually a saint is anyone who belongs to Jesus, just as they do. As a way of saying "thank you" to Jesus for taking care of us, we take care of other people, too, who are hungry or in need. That makes us saints too. If your church participates in a homeless shelter or feeding program, invite the children to accompany their parents to volunteer in the program.

Musical Suggestions

I Sing a Song of the Saints of God—The Presbyterian Hymnal 364

For All the Saints—The Presbyterian Hymnal 526

Precious Lord, Take My Hand—The Presbyterian Hymnal 404

1. Words by J. M. Neale. An excellent choir setting of the carol is in Reginald Jacques and David Willcocks, eds., *Carols for Choirs 1: Fifty Christmas Carols* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961) 34.



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

Reflection from Hunger for the Word, Year C

© 2006 by the order of Saint Benedict, Inc.

Published by Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota.

Reprinted with permission.

1. Words by J. M. Neale. An excellent choir setting of the carol is in Reginald Jacques and David Willcocks, eds., *Carols for Choirs 1: Fifty Christmas Carols* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961) 34.