

I hold in my hand the Episcopal Church's book of Saints. There's a page for each of the Saints that the Episcopal Church has set aside a day to remember. From St. Paul to St. Patrick. From Martin Luther to Martin Luther King, Jr. From Agnes, a 12 year old girl who was martyred in Rome in the year 304, to Jonathan Daniels, a 26 year old seminarian and classmate of my father's, who was martyred in Alabama in 1965. These are the great men and women of the Christian faith who provide an example for all of us.

But there are many, many more saints who are not famous, saints who don't have their own feast days. That's why the church, in her wisdom, has set aside a day to honor all the saints. And don't forget, the word saint is not just a term for "super-Christians." The word 'saint' is a NT term which applies to all Christians. On All Saints' Day, we give thanks for all of the countless saints, all the countless faithful followers of Jesus Christ, those who have gone before us, and those who live in our midst today. As our sequence hymn says in very quaint British language,

"You can meet them in school, or in lanes, or at sea,  
In church, or in trains, or in shops, or at tea,  
For the saints of God are just folk like me,  
And I mean to be one too."

On this All Saints Day, I'm not going to talk about lessons from scripture. Instead, I'm going to talk about three people, three saints that I've known. In fact, I buried all of them. In a way, there's nothing spectacular about any of them. Yet their 3 funerals were the 3 largest I've ever done. I believe that's because all 3 give some insight into what it means to be a saint, to live an ordinary but authentic Christian life. So I want to talk this morning about Morris, Roy, and Andrea.

The first man I want to talk about is the first man I buried. The first funeral I ever did was for a man named Morris. (Some of you may know Morris's granddaughter—Paige McKay, who's a member of St. Stephen's.) Morris was a Kansas boy who wanted to be a reporter. In his early twenties he worked for the Amarillo Globe News, and in that capacity he interviewed both Will Rogers and Charlie Goodnight. (At the time of his death, he was the last reporter who could make that claim.)

In his mid twenties, Morris was hired to work at the Childress Index, in the small town of Childress, Texas. In a very short period of time, Morris became the editor-in-chief, a position he held for the next 60 years until he died. He eventually bought the paper as well.

Now, Morris could have gone to the big city, to Dallas, or Kansas City, or New York. Instead, he chose to stay in Childress and put out, in his words, a "good, honest newspaper."

The reason I knew Morris is that he was also the Sr. Warden of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, which was one of the 3 congregations I served right out of seminary. In fact, for a time, there were just 2 members of St. Luke's: Morris, and one other man. They hardly ever had a priest come. So they would take turns, week by week, leading the service, one for the other. Now in a church with only 2 active members, you might think it'd be easy to become discouraged and chuck the whole thing. But Morris was very firmly convinced that God was calling him to keep the church opened. So he did.

Morris never became famous outside of his little town. He ran a little newspaper. He was devoted to his little church. None of these things would be deemed very important in the world's scheme of things. Yet Morris used the talents and tenacity God gave him to make his little corner of the world a better place. His is a good example for all of us.

My second funeral was for Roy, a member of Grace Episcopal Church, in Vernon. Roy was a Texas boy who became a pilot in WWII, flying cargo from India to China over "the hump." After the war, he and a partner bought a surplus DC-3 and flew it to Hong Kong. They started hauling freight, and then passengers from Hong Kong to Shanghai. Their business grew rapidly, and they added planes and flights to Manila, Singapore, and Bangkok. After 2 years, the airline was becoming so successful that the British government in Hong Kong was worried about an American owning such a strategically important business in their back yard. So they forced Roy to sell his airline to a British national.

The name of that airline was Cathay Pacific, which is now the 10<sup>th</sup> largest passenger airline and the 4<sup>th</sup> largest freight airline in the world.

I asked Roy if he was resentful about being forced to sell his airline, his 'baby,' and then have it become so successful. And he said, "No, I'm just glad I had a small part in getting her off to a good start."

Roy returned to Texas and went into the oil business. At times he was rich. At other times he was flat broke. That's the way the oil business sometimes works. But everyone said that it didn't matter whether Roy had millions or nothing. He was the same decent Christian man, regardless of how much money was in his bank account.

Roy had an exciting and fascinating life, a life packed with experiences. Pilot; war hero; aviation pioneer; oilman. But there's something else I should tell you about Roy. One day I asked him, "Roy, looking back on your life, what's the best thing that ever happened to you?" I thought I already knew the answer. I thought Roy was going to tell me that it was his family. He and I spent a lot of time talking about his kids and grandkids, and how proud he was of them. But Roy gave me a different answer. He said, "The best thing that ever happened to me was the day I turned my life over to Jesus Christ."

The most important and significant thing in Roy's life was his relationship with Christ. Roy had his priorities straight. God came first, and everything came second. Roy could have been incredibly successful in the airline business. Roy could have been resentful for having to give it up. Instead, Roy was thankful that he was a child of God, and that he was redeemed by Jesus Christ. Roy's example is a good one for all of us.

The largest funeral I conducted in Wichita was for Andrea. Andrea was a 46 year old homemaker. One day, she dropped dead, leaving behind a shocked husband and two distraught teenage daughters.

Andrea was not a mover or shaker. She wasn't famous in the community. She wasn't a celebrity. She didn't have her finger on the pulse of power. She was just a soccer mom. And yet, her funeral was the largest service in the history of Good Shepherd Episcopal Church.

We were unprepared for the number of people that showed up.

The church could squeeze about 250 people into the nave. Plus you could open a side wall between the church and the parish hall and seat an additional 150 people in folding chairs. If you can't do the math quickly, that's 400 seats. But that wasn't enough. We crammed over 600 people into Good Shepherd for Andrea's funeral. We literally used every chair in the building, even chairs from Sunday school classrooms and the desk chairs from our offices. And we still had people standing along the walls.

Why this kind of turnout, why this kind of tribute for an "ordinary" soccer mom? I believe it was because of the kind of person she was. She was very loving. She was extremely joyful. The French phrase "joie de vivre" epitomized her to a 'T'.

She had a warm hug ready for everyone she knew. She had a quirky sense of humor. Her jokes and comments were often off-the-wall, but they were always kind, never cutting or hurtful. When things were getting too serious at vestry meetings, she would break the tension with something hilarious to say.

And yet, that outer exuberance often masked a very deep, wise, and thoughtful side. And if the vestry ever got too focused on the bottom line, she was quick to remind all of us that in a church, caring for people in the name of Jesus Christ is always the real bottom line.

She was very concerned with the question, "What would Jesus do? How would Jesus treat the people around him?" And she tried to act accordingly. She tried to live and love in a Christ-like manner.

Just an ordinary soccer-mom, who exuded Christian joy and love for others with every fiber of her being. And she touched the lives of all the ordinary people she encountered in the course of her ordinary, day to day life. And I believe that's what drew a record crowd to her funeral.

Morris, Roy, and Andrea were not wildly successful in the way that the world defines success. But they were successful in the way that the gospel says really count. One was a newsman and one was an oilman and one was a soccer mom. And they were, all of them, saints of God.

Let us follow the example of All God's Saints, so that we may be saintly examples to others.