

Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us ... run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to JESUS, THE PIONEER AND PERFECTER OF OUR FAITH. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

See the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be His peoples and God Himself will be with them (Revelation 21:3)

“Good for you to have your first Sunday back from renewal leave on All Saints Sunday, which at Saint Marks is as big as Christmas and Easter,” said the gentle, smiling, retired bishop, as we shared coffee at a local restaurant.

I wondered if what he said was true. I concluded that, **“YES! All Saints Sunday here rivals the largest, most important Sunday of our worshipping year.”** And then I wondered why that is. And I decided that it’s because “the people of Saint Marks get it.”

Reaching that conclusion did not come instantly, and today I will share with you the theological ruminations that led me to this conclusion:

I begin with just a short parable:

Once upon a time, a crusading adventurer, perhaps wearing a floppy hat and carrying a whip, whilst on leave from his college professorship, happened upon a large temple looking building. He quietly opened the massive wooden doors, set into an ostentatious marble façade, to discover hundreds of people bowing, chanting, and worshipping. As his eyes passed over the throng, they finally rested upon a small ancient parchment, encased in a huge gold and jewel encrusted frame, hanging on the wall at the front of the sanctuary.

He waited in the wings until the people concluded their worship, and quietly left their wooden benches, each one kneeling in the direction of the apparently holy object, before turning to leave. When it appeared that the room was empty, he walked up to the front to gaze upon their object of worship. The frame had to be worth tens of thousands of dollars, or more. But he had a notion that it was the frame's content that was their primary object of attention.

"May I help you?" a quiet voice came from behind the adventuresome professor. A quiet unassuming priest had returned to greet the visitor. Upon hearing his questions, the priest explained their story; how the holy incarnate person of God had come and brought to them a treasure map, showing where all the riches of the kingdom could be found – riches worth selling all you owned in exchange to receive.

"Wow! Did you find it, as this man from heaven told you?" the professor asked.

"Oh, the people never looked for the treasure. They just appreciated the effort to send us the map. And we have worshipped the map all these centuries since."

"Let me see if I get this right," the professor said. "You had a holy person from heaven visit, and who gave you a map for incredible wealth, and you never looked for it. You just worship the map?"

"Ah, I see you are indeed a quick study," said the priest. "Yes, I believe you have it just right."

Now, this next part may come as a bit of a shock to you, but, as I continued my thinking, I turned to the four Gospels of our Bible – the "Good News of Jesus Christ, as He came to reveal it." And I discovered that **Jesus NEVER** said "**Worship me.**"

He **DID** say:

- **FOLLOW me**
- **LEARN from me**

- **WELCOME me**
- **BELIEVE me**
- **COME to me**
- **TOUCH me**
- **LISTEN to me**
- **LOVE me and**
- **ABIDE in me**

BUT He NEVER said “Worship me.”

But, like Peter’s encounter in the boat with Jesus, on a very, very good fishing day when they followed Jesus’ instructions, we have (not intentionally, am I saying) echoed Peter’s words: “**Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man.**” (Luke 5:8)

Oh, don’t get me wrong; our intentions are good. But we get so wrapped up in WORSHIPPING Jesus and THEOLOGIZING Jesus that we don’t seem to much HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS.

As I heard my daughter’s preacher say, during my visit in her church in Minnesota: “**Christianity is about a relationship with Jesus, not about beliefs, ideas, nor rules.**”

Sometimes it seems that **Jesus came to give us mouth to mouth resuscitation** and **we only want to talk about the theological implications of such a human-divine encounter, until we are literally blue in the face.**

We have been so intent on GLORIFYING and WORSHIPPING Jesus that we have reduced Jesus’ whole mission into a **fantastic birth (Christmas)**, **terrible death (Good Friday)** and **glorious reversal (Easter**

and Ascension) that we have forgotten to let Him be the PIONEER and PERFECTER (**read “role model”**) of our faith. I’m not making this stuff up. Look at the [Apostle’s Creed](#), page 881 in your UMHymnal.

BUT – thanks be to God (and to the writer of the book of Hebrews) **there is ALL SAINTS SUNDAY.**

Jesus came to be the mediator of the message from Heaven -- to show us the way – to **demonstrate what it looks like to live a life as creatures made in the very image of God** -- and we have largely worshipped Him right out of that function. So, until we can get back on track, we have **“THE SAINTS.”**

One of the best methods for praying I have encountered is a simple one in which you sit in a chair and draw an empty chair up beside you and use your imagination to put Jesus in that chair next to you, where you simply talk to Him as your best friend. It is a GREAT WAY to pray!

But I confess that I was unable to do it when I first tried ... because my imagination could not conjure up the Holy Son of God sitting in a chair next to me as a friend. So, as a stopgap measure, I imagined my best friend John Waldeck as sitting in that chair. John was my stand-in for Jesus, until I was able to work up to allowing Jesus my Lord to be Jesus my Best Friend.

And it worked.

So, I came to realize that this is what we do with All Saints. We’ve got Jesus so high and lifted up, that it’s hard to allow Him to come and be our

best friend, to be our Role Model. We keep saying: “Ah, but I’m **ONLY human**” instead of **allowing Him to show us how to be FULLY HUMAN**.

So we’ve got this cloud of witnesses – these folks whom we’ve known through the years. Ordinary folks. **Sinning saints** and **saintly sinners**.

We’ve spend a lifetime with them. We’re comfortable with them. And they are now able to be the mediators that Jesus came to be. We are able to get comfortable with them introducing us to the very real possibility of rubbing shoulders in this life (as they do constantly now) with the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith.

For, it really is true: **See the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be His peoples and God Himself will be with them**

Thanks be to God.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.