

I'd like to share with you something that I had quietly experienced for about 6 years where we were before coming to Garrettsville, and it had to do with living in our last appointment. It was a quiet and peaceful life living on our country road out there in the land of Goshen Township, about 31 miles from Garrettsville. There was traffic, but really not that much. And sometimes, after Jill had gone off to work and I would be alone at home or at the church next door, I would hear something. It would be the sound of the Township crew that comes to dig the new graves across the road for a funeral. There were lots of graves being prepared over those 6 years.

I never had thought about it before, but it is a bit of an odd thing living by a cemetery. That was the only time in our life where it happened. And so, even when we had not lost loved ones from our church, I would still hear the sounds and see the workers, and then they would park in our parking lot waiting for the people to arrive and for things to conclude, after which they head back across the road to wrap things up.

I had gotten to the point where I would say a little prayer for the family, and for the pastor who was speaking. And I would think about the person who was laid to rest. And one week it hit me, as the grave workers were doing what they do. Death is pretty serious business. We are all in such a hurry, and yet we all face something where we will take our turn, and nothing will stop that. One day they will do what they do, across that road or somewhere else, for one of us. They will do it for all of us. And today we have a very

sacred but sober holy day for the Church of Jesus Christ. This is All Saints Sunday. We have remembered already those whom we have lost in the last year, but also our loved ones from whatever year they passed away from us. I feel the guidance and Spirit of the Living God moving me to ask each of us a very serious question, with regards to our lives lived and served within a Church in this world: The question is, *What will they say about me?* This is a big question for every one of us. *What will they say about me?*

Today we have heard the names of our loved ones. We call them the saints. Please do not be scared-off by that word. Saint comes from a NT word “hagi-os” which means “a holy one.” Well, what is “holy?” Holy, especially from a biblical stand-point means “separate.” To be holy means you stand out. You are not just an average person, even if you were a humble person who did not try to run the world, and you didn’t think you were anything more than an average person.

I spoke with my Mom one time about this, and I asked her to name the top 5 most important saints from York United Methodist Church, my family’s home church near Medina. It did not take her long. She named 5 dear women who were warm and dear people. Here my Mom was, my Dad had not gone to church, we had moved to a new area in 1962, my Mom had already lost both of her parents by the age of 22. So here she was with young children and her husband, and she made her way to the local Methodist Church, the same as she had attended 17 miles away where she grew up. My Mom was so helped and comforted by 5

dear women who in a sense functioned to fill in some warmth and care that she had lost with the early passing of her mother. Ellen McMasters, Buehlah Fredricks, Cora Hinman, all women in their 60's and 70's who meant the world to my Mom. I knew them when I was little. But here we are so many years later, 50 years later, and my Mom remembers those saints who were comforting and loving, who would greet my Mom as she brought her little ones to church (in about a year, my Dad started to attend as well, and they both were very active for the last 50 years).

What will they say about me? My Mom was saying some wonderful things about those saints who were so important in her life at the church. It makes me smile. That is the way it is supposed to be.

I figured something out that has worked for me especially in the last 30 years. When I do funerals, I have a method for proceeding which I think has been helpful. I try to raise the question of the meaning and purpose of our lives, and I suggest to the grieving family that we all live for two reasons, #1 to be blessed by God who is the great Blessor, and #2 we live to be a blessing to someone else. To be blessed, and to be a blessing to someone else, these should be two sides of the same coin. Hopefully we are all blessed, and hopefully we are aware of it and acknowledge it, and we thank God for it. But the other part is the one that is more important. How have we been a blessing to others during the course of our lives? What do we leave behind in others? How have we added goodness to the world? An Orthodox Rabbi who

was also one of my teachers once told us that this is why people should be sad at funerals. This should be so not because of our loss, but because of the loss of that person to add goodness to the world. I have always thought that that was a very wise statement.

What will they say about me? Please note, this is not a suggestion that we start doing things to be noticed, so that our name will end up on a plaque somewhere. That is not it. I think that our scripture lesson today sums it up. Allow me to re-read.

30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. 31 Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, 32 and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. 1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, 2 and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

What will they say about each of us? Let's keep that in the back of our minds as we remember those whom we have lost in the last year, and all those who have gone on before us. We thank God today for all the Saints who have had an affect upon our lives and our Church. AMEN.