

All Saints Day 2024

St. Stephen's, Troy & Canterbury on the Lake

Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry

May the God who Create us...

Good Morning!

Happy Feast of All the Saints. And I might add, happy day to all the sinners and all the souls. Greetings to all of us, past, present and yet to come, all of us made in God's image and likeness, using the gifts, using ALL the gifts God has given us to make a difference.

My hunch is that saints, blessed Holy ones of God, are people like you and like me, who honor the gifts, God gives us and then makes use of these gifts, perhaps in ways that surprised themselves and everyone who knows them. How is it that Saints, are named, made, or called forth? How do Saints come to be?

The author of the Wisdom of Solomon writes,

*God tested them and found them worthy
like gold in the furnace God tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering, God
accepted them... they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble.
(The Wisdom of Solomon 3:5-7).*

What does that mean—what does that look like?

The Pulitzer Prize winning author, Isabelle Wilkerson, in her book *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* tells the story of a photo from Nazi Germany. The picture is of a person I presume to be Saint, or to have Saint-like qualities. It's a black and white image taken around about 1936 on a dock in Hamburg, Germany. It's taken from the side and it depicts rows and rows of men facing forward, apparently looking at a newly built ship about to be launched. In the picture all of the men, more than a 100 or so, all have their arms extended in a "Heil Hitler" salute. Except one man in the back right corner of the photo. When you notice him, when you see him there is no way to "unsee" him, for he is the only one in the photo who has his arms crossed and he is looking away from the direction to which everyone else is focused.

The man has been identified as probably August Landmesser. In 1931, August Landmesser, joined the Nazi party, in 1935 he left the party, because he had fallen in love with and was living with a Jewish Woman, Irma Eckler. They were unable to marry because it was against Nazi law, but they became a couple and had two children. In an attempt to get work August tried to flee to Denmark in 1937. He was arrested at

the border and tried for “dishonoring the race.” About two years after this photo in 1938, He was sent to a concentration camp. His partner, Irma, is believed to have died in Treblinka a few years later.

After five years, August was released from the concentration camp and forcibly conscripted into the German army. He died in the war in 1944.

Isabelle Wilkerson says, in her book, *Caste*, “Looking back from our vantage point, he is the only person in the entire scene who is on the right side of history. Everyone around him is tragically, fatefully, categorically wrong. In that moment, only he could see it,” (Pp xv-xvi).

She goes on to say, “In a totalitarian regime such as the Third Reich, it was an act of bravery to stand firm against an ocean,” (p. xvi).

I go a bit further and say that his actions were *sanctified, that is completely and utterly holy and blessed*. And he was a Saint. He quietly offered his very best, when other people through fear, peer pressure, ignorance, prejudice or evil intent did the opposite. The man in this photo is a Saint. An ordinary human, a man who cared and loved and learned and changed and then offered his best self to the world.

Wilkerson concludes the preface of her book with these words, that I believe are trustworthy and true:

We would like to believe that we would have taken the more difficult path of standing up against injustice in defense of the outcaste. But unless people are willing to transcend their fears, endure discomfort and derision, suffer the scorn of loved ones and neighbors, and co-workers and friends, fall into disfavor of perhaps everyone they know, face exclusion and even banishment, it would be numerically impossible, humanly impossible for everyone to be that man. What would it take to be him in any era? What would it take to be him now?” (p xvii).

How? How does he manage to do this? How is he a Saint, I want to know, because like the song says, “I mean to be one too.” I believe sainthood, comes to ordinary people, folks living and breathing just like ourselves, bit by bit, morning by morning. My hunch is that August never intended to be a Saint or to be someone who defied a mass movement and a fascist government. But rather someone who knew how to hold what was good and right and true. At this moment and then the next.

That is my prayer, for myself, for you, and for this our world. That each of us, may know what is good and right and holy. And that we will hold to this, turn to what is Holy day in and day out, come what may. This is my prayer, for you, for me, and for all of us, because now more than ever, God needs us. Our country needs every single one of us: holding to hope, welcome, and love.

Amen.