
What is the Most Important Thing that Christians Do?

The Very Reverend Sam Candler
A Sermon at The Cathedral of St. Philip
Atlanta, Georgia
All Saints Day
1 November 2009 at 4:00 pm

A Sermon for The Requiem Eucharist -
Remembering Friends and Members of The Cathedral of St. Philip
Who have died in the past year
(with the music of Gabriel Fauré©)

What is the most important thing that Christians do?

Some would say our most important task is to serve the poor. Certainly that is a good and noble thing! Maybe our most important act is to do justice in the world. Yes, we do that, too. This election week, in particular, we are reminded that our politics and governments seek justice.

Maybe, many of us, if we had to identify the one most important act for Christians, would say "love." Loving one another is the most important thing we do. Surely we cannot deny that commandment. Christians are to love another, and even our enemies!

Today, however, All Saints' Day, we do something else. The task that we act upon today is different from all those I have just enumerated. I believe it is equally and extremely important.

Today, the task that we engage in together is remembering. We gather this day to remember. "Remembering" may be one of the most important things that Christians do.

In the liturgy, every Sunday, and maybe every day, we remember. The prayer that the priest says at the altar always includes remembering Jesus Christ among us. We recall his birth, life, suffering, and death. We remember his words. We remember his resurrection.

And, mysteriously, wonderfully, tremendously, as we remember Jesus, he becomes real to us. He is present with us. When we remember his body and his blood, they become real for us in the bread and wine of Eucharist. "Do this in remembrance of me," Jesus said. That remembrance feeds and strengthens us. That remembrance nourishes us to perform all the other important tasks of being a Christian in the world. Remembrance comes even before serving the poor, doing justice, loving one another.

Today, we also remember the saints who have gone before us. The people whose names we will recite in a few minutes are

the members of your families and friends who have died in the past year. You knew them well, very well. They are people you have touched and loved; and they touched and loved you.

It is worth remembering them. They are the saints who have gone before, and who are yet still with us, too.

I know, I know, maybe there were plenty of days when the person you are remembering today did not act like much of a saint. Maybe sometimes you remember all the things about your loved one that they did NOT happen to mention at the funeral!

That's okay. And maybe that even proves the point. God does not require perfection and completion here on the earth. God uses real flesh and blood, incomplete bodies that struggle and bleed, who get angry and lose their temper, who cry and laugh, and whom we continue to love in the deepest way.

They are saints whom we remember today, because they showed us something of the holy. Maybe they did not realize it, and maybe we did not realize it at the time. But they showed us some glimpse of divine love. And what a memory that is.

The most important thing we can do for them is to remember them. And the most important thing we can do for ourselves, and for others, is to remember them. Remember those who have passed this way before. They are saints.

They have died, and lo! They live! They live, too, when we remember them.

But today, they live in another way. When they lived on this earth, they were incomplete, imperfect, and just as each of us is still unfinished, incomplete, not yet perfected. When you remember the saints today, it is good to remember their past; but remember, too their present. Today, at this moment, they are in that heavenly state of completion and perfection.

By "perfection," I do not mean that they are utterly pure and sterile and without idiosyncrasies and personalities. They still have all those wonderful and maybe sometimes irritating habits. But they are now finished, perfected, completed, in their journeys. That is what we remember today. Remember their perfection, and you have a glimpse of heavenly glory!

Remember, today. It is the most important thing we do as Christians. When we remember, we make real the kingdom of God.

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

Comments? Contact Dean Candler at: SCandler@stphilipscathedral.org