

**Nov 2 2008  
Feast of All Souls**

**St James Episcopal Church**

**The Rev. Kathy Crary**

Do any of you have heroes from the world in which we live? I have a couple, I think Eleanor Roosevelt was someone pretty special. I think John Muir was pretty cool, too.

This is a participation sermon so I am going to ask you a question and yes, I expect you to answer it out loud. What about you? Shout out who you think is a great hero or role model or whatever!

Let us do a little of this by category. Great humanitarian? Great musician?  
Great peacemaker?

Everyone has heroes and there are niche heroes that would only be heroes to a narrow part of the society. For example, Boris Spasky is a hero in tournament chess. And Joe Montana is a hero in pro football circles. If you like baseball, it could be Willie Mays or Babe Ruth or Jackie Robinson. If you like to read it might be Hemingway, Tolkein or Emily and Charlotte Bronte.

We have a natural tendency to admire and respect people who do great things. Sometimes they display feet of clay and we find out they aren't perfect, but often that doesn't change their HERO status with us.

WHC Frend, in his *magnum opus* called The Rise of Christianity, a book over 1,000 pages long covering the first 600 years of Christianity, talks about the concept of the saint. As Christianity spreads through the Middle East and into other regions like

Europe and Asia, the adherents to the faith are not always met with open arms. People are murdered for their faith and are stubborn to the end when threatened, even to losing their lives. If they had baseball cards back then, Christians would have produced a deck of great martyr cards, probably ringed around the edges with red. These people were held up as supreme examples of faith in our history. Others, credited with various miracles, are placed on a pedestal, too. Pretty soon the houses, the bones, the hair and teeth, the possessions are exalted to the state of relics, which can be owned, worshiped, housed in churches and venerated.

It took some time to develop this movement of saints and martyrs. Then, associated with some truth and some legends, calendars were started and pilgrimages were initiated. You wore the sign of the shell embroidered on dress, coat or tunic to indicate your pilgrim status. From these evolved the saints, their relics, their calendar dates and the attributes that made them patron saints over certain kinds of people, certain conditions and even certain cities or countries.

But when the church started out in the first couple of centuries everyone was considered a saint once he/she was baptized. Think about that for a minute. There were no super-Christian status markers yet. Everyone who is baptized is a saint. Suddenly hymns like "For all the saints, who from their labors rest..." will include a remembrance of me after I die, if I take that sainthood seriously.

When we go back to the heroes of our own day, I think about the plain little old guitar teacher who helped me learn my first few chords. This teacher wasn't Julian Bream or Christopher Parkening or Jeff Beck. Just a plain old simple person with enough guitar knowledge to get me started. And once started, maybe I could be the

next Segovia or as good as the Romeros. I'm not, but I could have been, all things being equal?

That is true on a faith community level, too. Someday maybe one of us will die for the faith, remaining both stubborn and steadfast in the midst of all temptation and coercion. Maybe one of us will become a great preacher, a forward-thinking bishop or maybe presiding bishop of the church. But all of us, all of us who are saints, participate in sharing the faith, teaching Bible verses and stories, participating as Sunday School and Godly Play teachers, being examples of the faithful life for the next generation.

So I want you to hear my message this morning. If you've listened thus far, you probably get it already. If you've wandered off in your mind, here is where you have to return to the sermon. You are a saint. Maybe you aren't the kind of saint hero that is the more common use of the term, but you are a saint. You are in the blessed position of sharing the faith and acting as a role model of faith for someone, a family member, a child, a friend, a co-worker, a neighbor. Take your responsibility seriously and be joyful.

It is a glorious title, and God has given it to you. It is time to stand up and claim your place in the family. I want to hear you say it just one time. I am a saint. Now you say it with me, "I am a saint". Amen.