
"What Are You Looking For?"

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A sermon by the Rev. Ricardo Bailey

"What are you looking for?" I'm looking for some saints!!"

You may say to yourself after you hear these words that "Father Bailey has some nerve!" But, I am going to take the plunge anyway! Cathedral family,

*"Do you know what it means to miss New Orleans?
And miss it each night and day?
I know I'm not wrong this feeling's gettin' stronger
The longer, I stay away
Miss them moss covered vines the tall sugar pines
Where mockin' birds used to sing
And I'd like to see that lazy Mississippi hurryin' into spring*

*The moonlight on the bayou a creole tune that fills the air
I dream about magnolias in bloom and I'm wishin' I was there*

*Do you know what it means to miss New Orleans?
When that's where you left your heart?
And there's one thing more I miss the one I care for
More than I miss New Orleans!"*

Even though I am a born and raised ATL-ien, I LOVE myself some New Orleans! I went to college there, to Xavier University of Louisiana! I went, I experienced and I REPENTED after my first Mardi Gras in February of 1993! Then I found out that if you lived in New Orleans you found out very soon that you didn't "go" to Mardi Gras, but Mardi Gras came to you! Yes Lord, good folks, great food and five years of memorable fun! I must say, THANK YOU JESUS, for New Orleans! One thing that I remember when I was there was the deep affection and the devotion that the People of the Crescent City had for THE NEW ORLEANS SAINTS! Yes, "dem Saints" would make our brothers and sisters in the Bayous laugh, cry, have near cardiac arrests and even new-found faith in the gift of miracles! New Orleanians love their Saints!

It is obvious that I am working with the word "saint" to not only describe a team, but a movement and a way of life that liberates our minds and keeps our eyes on the prize to hold on!

It is very clear that the Apostle Paul LOVED the saints as well. In 1 Corinthians 1 the Apostle states that the ones who are called Saints are those "**who are sanctified in Christ Jesus.**" As Christians, we have an idea of what it means to be sanctified; for Paul being a saint does not mean that you are so Heavenly-bound that you are no earthly good! To be a saint means that you take to heart what the Apostle continues to say to that Church in Corinth regarding God's plan for them, "**He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful.**"

Therefore, I think for all of us gathered in this Cathedral this morning I can answer Jesus' question in today's Gospel. You remember what was proclaimed: Jesus was walking and saw that two of John's disciples were following Him and "He said to them, '**What are you looking for?**'" Then after explaining what it was that they wanted: ultimately, to be in communion with Him, Jesus said, "**Come and see.**" What are we coming to see this second Sunday in the Season of the Epiphany of Jesus? Why did we come to the Cathedral of Saint Philip this morning?

We came to see, to experience, to celebrate and to thank God for the people who KNOW that God is faithful. We came to be in fellowship with Jesus and to step out in faith and to be in communion with each other. We came to be encouraged and to know that in the eyes of Paul, and I would dare to say in the eyes of Jesus, **that we are saints!**

We don't have to wait for a ceremony, or a convention or even an agreement among bishops, deans, rectors and theologians - by God's purpose and by His design you are I are called to be saints! But, hold up, wait a minute! Does that mean that we cash in our Divine 401K plan and retire? Does that mean that we finally got a piece of the pie like George and Weezie? Does that mean that we could possibly sing or say these words?

*"Fish don't fry in the kitchen;
Beans don't burn on the grill.
Took a whole lotta tryin'
Just to get up that hill.*

*Now we're up in the big leagues
Gettin' our turn at bat.
As long as we live, it's you and me baby
There ain't nothin' wrong with that.*

*Well we're movin' on up,
To the east side.
To a deluxe apartment in the sky.
Movin' on up*

*To the east side.
We finally got a piece of the pie.*

No my sisters and brothers, we cannot retire and turn it all in. Yes, it's a blessing to be a saint and to share that blessed identity with one another but we all know that there is a lot of work to do. The work is out there: serving the poor, educating those who do not have the same opportunities that we have, extending genuine compassion to those who are in need. My sisters and brothers, we have so much work to do! So many people are justifiably waiting for their "**piece of the pie!**" However, I believe that I stand with you when I say that a lot of this work must be done by taking a moment and looking at ourselves in the mirror!

We must remember that when people come on this property and into this worship space people are looking for a Church, for a witness - may I even dare to say to you, even a saint - to extend to them the genuine respect, love and compassion that every person hungers for. It doesn't matter how many degrees you have, it doesn't matter how much money you have, it doesn't matter how educated you are, it even doesn't matter if the title "Reverend" is in front of your name - we all are called to remember that as Saints **we must be in communion with one another!** If you didn't know, let me tell you as it is said to me very often: "**Baby, you are not THAT important! The WORLD does not REVOLVE around you!**" Oh yeah, where I come from we add - "**if you can't say AMEN, say OUCH!**"

True Sainthood means that we live in the moment, keeping our eyes on the prize and putting what we believe as Christians into practice with EVERY person that we meet! Sainthood is LIVING OUT your call to be more like Jesus day after day! Sainthood is knowing that HE is God and that we are not! Sainthood is knowing where your help comes from and that you and I must have the humility to know that we have not made it far on our own! Sainthood in the Name of Jesus, means that we are not perfect but through His AMAZING GRACE, we are being PER-FECT-ED day after day!

That is why I LOVE that song by Pastor Donnie McClurkin titled "We Fall Down, But We Get Up!" The words say so simply, yet so profoundly -

*"We fall down but we get up
We fall down but we get up
We fall down but we get up
For a saint is just a sinner who fell down and got up!"*

Remember Church, that we are all on the same team. As Baptized and Eucharist-fed Christians, we are going to fall down and mess up. As a matter of fact, I can make a prediction and I am not even a member of The Psychic Friends Network: we are going to say something offensive to someone. We are going to act less-than the expectation of what a follower of Jesus really is. We are going to act selfish and be self-centered, but through all of this, when WE look at ourselves in the mirror and have the courage to actually FACE OURSELVES. Then we will have our personal Epiphany and realize that our crown needs a little polishing! We need the Super-Glue of God's Grace to reattach the gems of true Sacramental living on our crowns.

We need to do what a saint is supposed to do and that is to imitate what we always celebrate whenever we come together as the Church of Jesus Christ. We work to make things right and we get up to lift one another up as well! As Dean Candler prayed the Opening Collect from the Book of Common Prayer this morning, I pray that you will remember that the Church's request from God is that we all may be

"..illuminated by [His] Word and Sacraments, [and, that we] may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that He may be known, worshiped and obeyed to the ends of the earth!"

I believe that these words fit the "job description" of what it means to be a Christian, to be a Saint, to be an Episcopalian!

My friends, God is faithful and our call as His Saints is to IMITATE with great JOY and hard work the same fidelity in every aspect of our lives. In my personal faith journey I am thankful to God that I learned how to be a man when I was in New Orleans. Most importantly, I learned not only how to pray, but I revered and saw the miracle of God's action and fidelity through praying mothers and grandmothers who experienced violence in burying sons and grandsons. I experienced saintly-fidelity in the love and patience that I received when I lived in that lovely city. God has a sense of humor! Everyone can see the "bad" and "negativity" that is associated with a city or a people, but I think that we all can use a gumbo-bowl full of New Orleanian spirituality and see the holy hand of God touch each and every person so that on a Monday night, or even all day Sunday we all, especially here at Saint Philip's Cathedral, can call and celebrate the fact that we all are saints!

I don't have to "miss" New Orleans like Louis Armstrong sang; *I see the holiness of God and the joy-filled Saints right in front of me today!*

Saints of Atlanta: May God continue to bless you all! Now, let us continue to celebrate our faith in God and the faith that God - GET READY FOR THIS CHURCH - the FAITH that God has in us! It's only January 19 but I am going to wish all of you in advance - *A BLESSED ALL SAINTS SUNDAY!*

Saint Martin Luther King, Jr. of Atlanta, PRAY FOR US!

Let the Cathedral say AMEN!