

PEOPLE'S PULPIT...



Sermon by CHARLES T. RUSSELL, Pastor Brooklyn Tabernacle.

All Saints' Day

"Both He That Sanctifieth and They That Are Sanctified Are All of One: For Which Cause He Is Not Ashamed to Call Them Brethren" (Hebrews ii, 11).

Sunday, October 31.—Pastor Russell of Brooklyn Tabernacle preached today from the above text and said in part:—

Tomorrow will be observed by our friends of the Catholic, Lutheran and Episcopal churches as "All Saints' Day." At an early date after the death of the apostles, probably in the third century, the custom crept into the Church of invoking the blessing of the saints. Some held in remembrance a patron saint, whose influence and memory were of a merely local character, and a certain day in the year was set apart as a memorial and for invoking his influence in the heavenly courts. When subsequently papacy was organized, gradually the majority of the Christian congregations acceded to papacy's claims that its bishop is the special vicar of Christ, reigning in his stead and exercising his authority. Many submitted themselves to this rule and thus were absorbed into that great system which still holds sway in the world. It was papacy that established "All Saints' Day" as a holy day for the invocation of all saints not otherwise particularly provided for by separate days of invocation.

Although saints admittedly are rare—few in comparison to professed Christians—nevertheless it seems there were enough so considered in the time of Gregory IV, to appropriate nearly all the days of the year. In other words, there were about 305 recognized in Gregory's time—after Christianity had been in operation for 800 years. Hence tomorrow will be the day for invoking the blessing of all the saints of the past one thousand years. But just how many or how few they are, according to the records of the celebrating churches, we do not surely know. If the records of the first eight centuries were correct, in the same proportion we should not expect that the total number of saints recognized would be above one thousand. One said thought connected with the celebration tomorrow must present itself to all thinking minds amongst the celebrants; that is, that only the saintly do they acknowledge as of holy character, fit for heaven, because the unsaintly, the unholy, would certainly be unfit. The teaching of papacy is that since only the saintly can be ushered into heaven at the time of their death, all the unsaintly, the undeveloped, they hold, must first experience awful tortures in Purgatory—to purify them, to make them ready for heaven.

Protestants on the contrary have discarded Purgatory, claiming that it is an unscriptural doctrine. They do not, however, claim that any but the saintly are prepared for heaven at death, nor that God has promised heaven to the untaught or undeveloped in Christian character. Hence in some respects the Protestant theory is still more grievous, more terrible, more awful, for the bereaved than the Catholic view, in that it offers no hope for all sterility to any unsaintly. Prayers to the saints, we believe to be unscriptural and unreasonableness. Nowhere in the Bible are we authorized to pray to the dead—either saints or sinners. On the contrary the Scriptures set forth the Heavenly Father as the supreme object of worship, though they do indicate the propriety of praying to our Lord Jesus also. As we read, "All men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father" (John v, 23). But prayers to the dead are unreasonableness, according to the Bible, which teaches that "the dead know not anything" (Ecclesiastes ix, 5); that "their souls come to honor and they know it not—to dishonor and they perceive it not of them" (Job xiv, 21); and that "there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" (Ecclesiastes ix, 10).

The Scriptures do recognize the difference between the saints, the Lord's holy ones, and the remainder of mankind. And it is assuredly true that the great masses of humanity are totally unfit for the glorious and perfections of the heavenly state. It is true that the Church is called upon to develop the saints and graces of the holy Spirit and is assured, as St. Peter declares, "I go do these things, ye shall never be; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (I Peter i, 11). But we hold that it is not only unscriptural, but irrational, to believe that all mankind except the saintly deserve centuries of torment in Purgatory or an eternity of torture in a worse and hopeless place. Let us take the Scriptural proposition, the only consistent one, the one which agrees with our five senses and with the Bible—that the dead are dead, and that resurrection from death in what they need and what our Lord's death will secure for every member of our race. Let us accept this statement of the Bible, "Blessed and holy is he that hath met in the First Resurrection, on such the Second Death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Revelation xx, 6). Let us accept the Scriptural explanation of the thousand years that Millenniumal

teacher of spiritual things. "The Lord knoweth them that are his" (I Timothy ii, 19).

How to Become Sanctified.

Seeing that the sanctified are comparatively few, and that evidently few can properly direct the way toward a condition which they have not themselves attained, it behooves us to look carefully to the instructions given us by our Lord Jesus directly and through his apostles. St. Paul, who wrote, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification," also wrote, "We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the Truth; whereunto he called you by our Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thessalonians ii, 13, 14). Note from these words that the call of the Church is the special feature of this present Gospel Age and its message. Note also that our call is not to sectarianism, but to a heart relationship with the Lord through a belief of the Truth and a proportionate getting rid of error. And this enlightenment through the Truth progresses in proportion to our sanctification of spirit—of thought, of word, of deed.

Note again the same Apostle's explanation of the matter. He says that he addresses them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus (who were) called to be saints, and he explains that while they had been sinners, "children of wrath, even as others," they had been cleansed by faith through acceptance of the finished work of Christ on our behalf. "Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (I Corinthians vi, 11). The same St. Paul, addressing the Ephesian brethren, says, "I commend you to God, and to the Word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified" (Acts xx, 32). Note here that it is only the sanctified of the present age that are to get the inheritance that is now offered—the heavenly inheritance with our Lord Jesus, a share with him in his heavenly Kingdom. Note also how the Apostle here again lays emphasis upon the Scriptures as containing the power which not only leads us to consecration and setting apart to the Lord's service, but which will strengthen us in thought and word and deed to do his good pleasure, to maintain our sanctified relationship with him through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Elected Through Sanctification. St. Peter (I Peter i, 2) explains to us that God's election of the members of the Church from amongst the world during the present age is along the line of sanctification. He elects that all those who shall accept his favor to the extent of sanctification in the trying conditions of the present time shall be joint-heirs with our Lord and Redeemer in his Millennial Kingdom. The Apostle's words are, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, into obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (I Peter i, 2). Here we have the matter succinctly stated—faith in the blood of Jesus is essential as the first step in the way to God. "No man cometh unto the Father but by me," said our Lord. Then our way must be through sanctification of the Spirit, of the will, the setting apart of our hearts from earthly ambitions and pleasures to heavenly ones—deadness to the world and a liveness toward God. This work of grace must progress day by day.

Our sanctification is not merely for the beginning of our Christian experience, but to be the very essence of our lives thereafter. The trials and testings of life from the world, the flesh and the devil will serve to demonstrate the thoroughness of our sanctification. God, however, is not seeking to prove whether or not we are perfect in the flesh, for he knows and informs us that we are imperfect. He does, however, desire to prove that our consecration, our sanctification, our setting apart of ourselves to be faithful to the Lord at any and every cost is not merely a passing whim or fancy, but by continual instructions of his Word by the inspirations of his Promises. By the testings of his disciplines he would fix indelibly, unalterably, this decision of ours to be entirely his in thought, in word, in deed—even unto death.

"Copies of His Son." St. Paul, consistently with his statements already quoted, wrote to the Christians at Rome respecting God's foreknowledge and predestination of the Elect Church, saying, "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans viii, 29). Our Heavenly Father decreed that no one might be a member of this elect Church except sanctified ones. And these must be tested before final approval. Their Lord, their Redeemer, having been a saint fully consecrated to the Father's will, these called, chosen and faithful followers will likewise be saints and, in this respect, the Apostle declares, they will be copies of their Redeemer, and he will be an Elder Brother amongst them, when they shall share his glory in his Kingdom.

Notice the harmony of all this with our text, "Both he that sanctifieth our Lord Jesus and they that are sanctified (this elect Church) are all of one of one spirit of loyalty to the Father and his righteousness—and baptized by the one spirit into the one Body, of which Christ is the Head." For this cause he (the glorified Redeemer) is not ashamed to call these sanctified ones, finally tested, his brethren on the highest plane of nature—his own, the Divine nature in glory, honor and immortality, far above that of angels.

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