**23 Pentecost-All Saints Sun., Nov. 4, 2012, 12:28-34, The Rev. Mary S. Trainor**

Let's play the game "who am I." This person's birthday is coming up on Dec. 2. He was born in 1983, brought up in California, got A's in school, calls San Diego home, never married but has a girlfriend named Erin. His father was strict, cautioning against alcohol consumption-- as it would adversely affect his sports, which included baseball, basketball, and football. He began his college life in an obscure junior college, but was able to transfer to the University of California. In 2005 was drafted by the NFL, and became a starting quarterback in 2008. After a scoring play, he celebrates by making a motion of putting on an invisible championship belt. He is a devout Christian but is subdued about proclaiming his faith. He says he likes the quote from [St. Francis of Assisi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_of_Assisi), who said, "**Preach the gospel at all times. If necessary, use words.**"’

By now, you have probably figured out that I am speaking of Aaron Rogers. Do you think Aaron ever holds back anything of himself in a Packer game? No, he can't and doesn't. I am using Aaron Rodgers today as an example, because it helps us understand Jesus' teaching in today's Gospel. Part of the success of Aaron Rogers relates to his throwing his heart, soul, mind and strength into the game. Heart is the emotional side; Aaron has to engage his own feelings, as well as those of the team members. The Soul is the essence of the unique inner self, brought to the present moment. The mind is crucial for a quarterback, having to quickly respond to changing tactics of the opposing team! Strength-- muscles prepared for the task at hand; no muscle is held back for another day. In the Gospel, Jesus said that the first commandment is, "***you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your minds, and with all your strength.***" We are not to leave anything out or behind when it comes to our relationship with God, the most crucial thing in our lives. Yet, in our daily lives, we get used to not engaging our whole selves. We leave a behind part of who we are routinely: like watching TV out of the corner of your eye in a restaurant when you are there to visit with someone at your table; or doing a work task while being mentally elsewhere. We do this out of self-protection, unawareness, or a lack of caring or commitment. We get used to operating this way. When it comes to our relationship with God, however, if we pull back part of ourselves from God we miss the mark: we won't experience the abundance of life God has for us. So, how **do** we love God with all we've got? We do it by intentionality: we make the decision to love God with all we have, and not hold back. Make a point of telling God how much you love Him every morning for a week, and it will become a habit: a holy habit. Try it. Loving God with all you are gets more natural over time. And, you can even do a self-check; you can tell if you are actually loving God by your own behavior. When I am spending lots of time with God, praying and studying God's Word, I find that I am more patient, more understanding of others, less fearful, more full of love. And, when I am loving God less, the opposite is true. When we love God with all we've got, it shows; this has to do with the second commandment Jesus gave in today's Gospel: "***You shall love your neighbor as yourself***." The word "neighbor" actually means everyone, not just people who live near you! This is not limited to your family and friends, or to co-workers, or those like you, to those you like; it is all others. This is what distinguishes Christ-followers from others. If we are loving God with our whole self, love of others flows naturally. This kind of love is called "*agape*" love, and it is a whole lot more than being nice. The Greek word, *agape*, appears in the New Testament 320 times! We pass on God's *agape* love with God's power and patience to others; if we try to do this only from our own power it does not work. We get scared or exhausted or frustrated or judgmental or selfish. *Agape* love is patient and kind, loyal, forgiving, compassionate, nonjudgmental, sacrificial. Dr. James Fenhagen, a seminary Dean, is quoted saying, "**Modern Christians tend to have hard crusty exteriors but soft inner cores. The problem is God calls us to have a solid inner core (grounded in His agape love for us) and a soft exterior."**

Living a life according to these two great commandments is made a bit easier for us by learning from the examples of people who have loved God with their whole heart, soul, mind, and strength-and loved their neighbors as themselves. They are called, "saints." Today we celebrate All Saints Sunday. The Church has observed the festival of All Saints continuously since about the year 600.  A "saint" is any believer in Jesus, whether in [heaven](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heaven_%28Christianity%29) or on earth. Story: A little boy attended a church that had beautiful stained-glass windows. He was told that the windows contained pictures of St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, St. John, St. Paul, and other saints. Later, the little boy told someone, "**A saint is a person whom the light shines through."**

So, today, we particularly give thanks for those we love who are in heaven; in a few minutes, we will be praying and honoring by name those on our All Saints prayer list. Some people pray to the saints, but we, as Anglicans, pray directly to God and go to the saints for inspiration. Saints encourage us on our spiritual journey. Our Episcopal calendar has different officially recognized saints we can learn from each week. The saints are not just "stained glass perfect people;" they were and are ordinary people who lived faithful lives following Jesus and reflect God's Light. Today, as you come forward to receive Holy Communion, sense the saints walking along next to you, cheering you along your spiritual journey as you love God with all of yourself and love your neighbor as yourself.

Four quick examples, all true: (1) Ruth, in our Old Testament reading this morning, shows us how to live with *agape* love. Her love for her mother-in-law, Naomi, is self-sacrificial; she made a decision to accompany Naomi and in doing so risked her life. But Ruth's love changed the entire direction of Naomi's life, from despair into hope. It is worthwhile to study the book of Ruth, for Ruth was Jesus' ancestor. (2) This Wednesday is the feast day of **St. Willibrord.** In the 7th century, the land which is now Germany was home to pagan barbarians who caused the Roman Empire to collapse. It was into this savage country that Willibrord, went to be a missionary and he was successful, and even built churches and monasteries. But just 18 years later the barbarians drove them out, many were killed. But Willibrord came back, rebuilt, and Christianity became established there. (3) Rob Radtke is an Episcopalian who lives in NYC. This past week with Hurricane Sandy, Rob's home did not lose power but many of his neighbors lost power for days and days. He hesitated at first, but he prayed and remembered the Bible verse "***perfect love casts out fear***" (1 John 4:18) and his fear washed away. Rob invited people he met on the street to come into his home; person after person took a hot shower, charged their cell phones and had a meal. Rob reported yesterday how blessed he has been by all these people in his home. (4) Lannie is known in his community for "just showing up" whenever something goes wrong. Lannie "rarely offers profound words; he just shows up, holds hands, sits, prays, reads with those going through tough times." Four examples of *agape* love shown in different ways in the lives of each of these examples, these saints of God.

Let us pray together the collect for All Saints Day, found near the bottom of page 245 in the BCP: **Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord: Give us grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.**