

What does a saint look like? How do we spot one in the crowd? What do we know about saints? We know they play football in New Orleans... We know they come marching in... We know they thrive somehow living with impossible people... In his cynical but wonderfully honest collection "The Devil's Dictionary" Ambrose Bierce puts it this way: "A saint is just a dead sinner, revised and edited."

The Church has traditionally regarded the path towards saintliness in one of two ways. For the first, imagine God's banquet. This is one of the great images of the kingdom of God. The great banquet. The great feast. Here is the banquet of creation, a table spreading from before the human marking of time and stretching forward into eternity. The table is spread, covered with the Bread of life and the Water of heaven and the Lamb of love and the Krispi Kreme doughnuts of salvation (hey, I'll imagine my feast – you imagine yours...). At any rate the eternal feast is celebrated. And from time to time a crumb from the table falls, and lands in our midst, and dwells among us. We call these crumbs from God's table "saints."

Human history is peppered with such individuals. Perhaps you have known a few, although they are among the rarest of creatures. These are folks who just seem to exude the Kingdom of Heaven. They seem to breathe different stuff, seem to be fed by a different baker. In most ways they don't seem to fit in this world, but they point to something beyond, something bigger. I went through my discernment process towards the priesthood with someone like this. He was on a different wavelength with the universe; his wiring was unique; he would say things that would take your breath away; he just seemed naturally dialed into the Kingdom of Heaven. These breadcrumbs struggle with this world and the unnatural fit. If I had to think of a well-known figure that would match this description St. Francis of Assisi comes first to mind. He never fit into the clothes his father tried to dress him in: the son of wealthy merchant destined for the same life of well-being. In fact Francis literally shed his clothes at what the church calls his conversion; I prefer to think of it as his awakening. And Francis went on to live his life on the margins – wandering the countryside, accumulating followers, changing lives, conversing with animals, living as a transparent window into the kingdom of God. Had Francis tried these stunts in metro Atlanta today he would have likely found himself institutionalized. With time he may have been cured of his saintliness.

When viewed as God's bread crumbs we might see that saints embody something unique and different. The name "saint" shares its Latin root with "sanctify" and "sacred." To be sanctified is to be set apart. In this morning's gospel we hear how Jesus describes this life set apart in the beatitudes. To be a vessel of God's kingdom is to be receptive to God working through oneself. The individual who is the bread crumb of God's kingdom is poor, meek, compassionate, and non-violent because this is the landscape that allows God's kingdom to thrive. You will notice that Jesus does not try to explain the beatitudes or justify them; they are the way it is. The bread crumbs just seem to know this; they are not concerned with an alternative.

Now these saintly pieces of bread in our midst serve a purpose: they point the rest of us along the way toward the second path of saintliness, the road that the rest of us are on. As it turns out our God is not interested in being fed at a great banquet. Our God is concerned with the relationship God has with humankind at such a table. Our God makes covenants with flesh and blood. Our God incarnates humankind. It seems that God desires all of us to be sanctified, set apart. Now you may well say, "Bill, that doesn't make sense. How can all people be set

apart? If all are to be sanctified, from whom are they set apart?" Well, we are not to be sanctified – sainted – to be set apart from other people. We are to be set apart for a way of being, for the peculiar purpose of living out God's love. We are to become breadcrumb. Now simply trying to live a good life may seem to do this – at least on the surface, but if that life lived is under your own steam it won't last long. Sanctification requires more than we can accomplish alone. Sanctification begins with our baptism. The Holy Spirit pours into us, and we are sealed – both in the sense of being marked as well as in the sense of having that Spirit bottled up within us. The Holy Spirit then begins working on us with the intent of making us breadcrumb, that is transparent windows into the kingdom of God.

Now in a way Bierce's definition of a saint may actually reflect this second path rather accurately. "A dead sinner, revised and edited" describes exactly the process of becoming that crumb of bread: the disciple of Jesus dies to sin, and her life or his life becomes one revised and edited: from that Holy Spirit bottled up within.

I have spoken before of a baptism that John Westerhoff describes from one of his trips to a Latin American country, and I feel it is worth retelling here. On a Sunday morning he said went to a church service in a small village. At the beginning of that ceremony the father of the child to be baptized entered the sanctuary carrying a small child's coffin. The mother next entered carrying several buckets of water from their family's well. These items were brought forward and placed on the altar. The priest then poured the water into the child's coffin, blessed this water, and then baptizes the infant in this font. The image is very clear: baptism means dying to one way of being and being born into the way of being that is full of the light and love of God. It means becoming that breadcrumb from God's holy banquet that is pure love, seeking creation over destruction, seeking to feed the broken and starving (spiritually speaking) who more than anything else need to know that there is an alternative to despair and lightless life. It means becoming food set apart.

This morning we baptize Sutton Drake, who in so many ways is exactly that breadcrumb, and has been for Elizabeth and Todd. To be saint is to be our true selves without all the shellac; we can see that most clearly in these littlest among us. We will be inviting Sutton to join us in our path that is leading us towards sanctification. In a few minutes we all will repeat our end of the covenant, the ways that we have vowed to become breadcrumb. We will fortify our breadly beings with words of commitment to fellowship, repentance, proclamation, service, and justice.

And perhaps most clearly we join Sutton by becoming a very specific kind of bread: the bread we taste and see each week at this table. This bread is for us our participation in the mystery of God's love. At this table we capture a glimpse of sanctity, a taste of what we are becoming. We join our breadly selves with all living now and all who have come before. Like this bread – which is to be for us Jesus Christ – we are taken. We are blessed. We are broken. We are shared. I can think of no better way of being for a piece of bread in our hungry world. And I can think of no better definition for the word "saint:" one taken, blessed, broken, shared.