



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE VERY REV. STEVEN L. THOMASON, DEAN AND RECTOR  
SPECIAL SERVICE OF CHORAL EVENSONG OBSERVING THE FEAST OF ALL SAINTS,  
WITH CELEBRATION OF THE MINISTRY OF BISHOP GREG AND MARTI RICKEL IN THE DIOCESE OF OLYMPIA  
SAINT MARK'S CATHEDRAL, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON  
NOVEMBER 6, 2022

## OBEDIENCE IS NOT THE SUPREME VIRTUE



In my nearly twenty years as a priest, I have been invited twice to preach at the service of thanksgiving for the ministry of one taking their leave. The first was fifteen

years ago as the cathedral dean who sponsored me to become a priest took his leave; the second is today. I'd be just fine for another fifteen years to pass before the

next, because in both cases I have been given explicit direction by the one leaving not to make it about them. The message each said essentially was: Preach the good news, and leave me out of it! I got what they meant.

What I said fifteen years ago, I will say again this evening: with all due respect, obedience is not the supreme virtue...so my apologies, Greg and Marti. I will preach the good news, but you are very much a part of it in this diocese, and tonight we give thanks for that. The supreme virtues of this Christian way and life, by my estimation, are faith, hope and love, so these are the prisms through which we will navigate the task before us.

It seems fitting we gather on this observed Feast of All Saints for this occasion of celebration of the Rickels' ministry among us. Today we hold in our hearts, not just these two whom we love, but all the saints who have stood in our houses of worship before us, and alongside us, and even those who are yet to come. And we stake our claim in that communion of saints, too, not in some dereliction of Christian humility, but precisely because nothing

we do in this journey of faith is ever detached from the whole, and it is by God's grace and encouragement, and the community's forbearance, that we find our way. Our collect for the day which Bishop Rickel just chanted, and we prayed with him invokes this hopeful trajectory: *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...*

There is, in the orbit of this Feast of All Saints, a simultaneous sense of transience and eternal peace, and to hold those two realities of life together in any given moment requires faith, by which I mean not an assent to credal statements, per se, but something deeper, more existential. Let me use the word faithfulness to exposit what I mean. To believe that we are part of this mystical communion, and to do so in the face of the vagaries of this mortal life, requires a courageous faithfulness, to show up, to trust that something we cannot fully comprehend on this side of the grave is an ever-present promise to us, on this side of the grave and beyond it. Even at the grave we make our song,

Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia, but we practice those words as an act of faithful living here and now. This is bound up with those ineffable joys of which the collect speaks, and to which the communion of saints bears timeless witness. Christian hope is not some wispy or fanciful thought about the afterlife; it is the means by which we live and move and have our being here in this life.

Which brings me then to the cardinal virtue of love. A sufficient focus for a sermon all unto itself, let me simply say here that it is THE essential ingredient in the primordial soup of the cosmos. When we profess that nothing—neither life nor death, not powers or principalities, not our victories or failures, nor anything else in all creation—nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, what we are saying is that love is the origin, life force, and telos of the cosmos. And if that is true, and we are a part of the cosmos, then love is what makes it all real. Or to say it more emphatically, this life is simply a journey of dying to the illusion that anything other than love is real. It is the gift we receive as life; it is the gift we have to share in this life. By faith and hope, we

practice such love as the unifying purpose of life.

Greg and Marti, whatever else you may take from your fifteen years in this diocese, we are keen to say tonight that you go with our gratitude for your faithful witness and work among us.

Be assured of our resilience as people of hope to be the Church in Western Washington who need not think we make our way alone—we have the whole Communion of Saints surrounding us, encouraging us, and we have each other, and by God's grace we will find our way, and you will too. We know that to be true largely because you have modeled such a way of life for us, and we are the richer for your having been here for a time.

And while you may be going about as far away from Seattle as you can and still stay on dry ground, know that all the ground between us will be holy ground, that we bless and send you as missionaries to the hinterlands of southeast Florida and wherever else God may lead you, and above all else, please know that the love that binds us together means you are inseparably and eternally part of us, as we

are part of you, and for that we give God thanks and praise.

And so, faith, hope and love—these three abide. Disobedient as I may be, if I have

preached the good news, with Greg and Marti very much a part, let the people say...Amen.



SAINT MARK'S  
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL

*Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!*