

Heroes of the Faith

Heroes are good to have. They teach us important things about ourselves and give us goals for living. Heroes inspire us in our daily life—and show us what we can accomplish when we really try.

Now, there are heroes in war, heroes at home (like police and firefighters), heroes in the struggles for equality or justice or progress. But there are also Heroes of the Faith—men and women who are examples in different areas of the Faith, examples of courage, or understanding, or devotion. We call these heroes—Saints—Saints of the Church—examples of how to live the Faith.

This morning I want to talk to you about 3 Saints—3 Saints who are heroes for us of different ways of living with Christ—examples that are inspirations for us in our daily living of the Faith.

The first is St. Michael—his Feast Day was last Thursday, Sept 29th—and he was one of the Archangels. Of course, St. Michael was an angel, and not a human being. So, his life is considerably different from ours. Be that as it may, St. Michael is an example to us **of steadfastness against evil.**

Years ago, my wife and I were journeying around England, and in our travels, we arrived at Coventry and to the wonderfully modern Cathedral of St. Michael and All Angels in the middle of that city. On the outside wall of the Cathedral was a larger-than-life-size bronze of an Angel holding a spear—and the spear was being thrust into the neck of a nasty dragon. That bronze statue replicated the sentence in the Book of Revelation in the New Testament that reads: "... and there was war in heaven, and Michael and his angels fought against Satan and his angels, ... and Michael was victorious, and Satan was cast out of heaven and fell to earth...." That statue and those words, symbolize the fight of good against evil, and the courage and steadfastness that is necessary for us to win out over evil.

Remember the slogan that goes something like this: "all that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." Well, there is evil in this world, in politics, in economics, in drug addiction, in unemployment and in injustice, in sexual perversion and inequality, in the breakdown of marriages and the half truths of advertising. We may like to pretend that such evil does not affect us—but it does, and Christians need to stand up for God and truth against the multitude of evils in our society. We may not like it—but St. Michael reminds us that we must fight against the evil around us, or evil will win. Thus, once a year, on Sept 29th, the Church celebrates St. Michael and All Angels, with the specific idea of reminding us that, like the hero St. Michael, we too are to stand firm against the evil we see around us—and to practice that in our daily life.

Last Friday, September 30th introduces us to our second saint, another hero for the Faith. His name is St. Jerome—no, not Jerome the giraffe on Friendly Giant—Saint Jerome, a hero of the Church in the 4th century. He was born about 342AD near the Adriatic Coast across from Italy, educated in Rome, and was ordained a priest. Now in St. Jerome's day, the majority of the people in the Western Church spoke Latin, yet the Lessons were read every Sunday in Greek, the original language of the Church. The Bible should be in the language of the people, he decided—so he dedicated himself to his lifelong work—the translation of the whole Bible from Greek and Hebrew into Latin. Why? So that everyone could hear and understand the Scriptures in their common language. St. Jerome's translation of the Bible was called the Latin Vulgate and it lasted for almost 1200 years as the standard Bible for the Church. What a gift St. Jerome gave to the Church! He used his scholarly understanding and knowledge in the service of Jesus, so that every man and woman for 1000 years could hear and understand the Word of God.

St. Jerome taught that what you believed was not enough. You needed to both speak and live your Faith. In a letter that he wrote to a young priest, he said, "For a Christian, mouth, mind and hand should all be in harmony." That is a colourful way of saying that each of us needs to put into action what we believe—that what we speak is how we should live. In other words, as Christians, we need to **understand the Faith, witness to the Faith, and live the Faith each day**. What we believe and speak is how we live. That's the second simple truth that we learn from these 3 Saints.

Now we come to the third Saint—this time, to one you all know, St. Francis of Assisi. His special day is tomorrow, October 4th. You may have noticed that there is an Icon of St. Francis in the side chapel. And he has something special to teach us today.

St. Francis was raised in a wealthy home, with all the advantages that a young man could have—but he cast it all away to follow Jesus. And how he followed! He became an apostle to the poor, wearing the poorest of clothing, begging for his food, and speaking about Jesus to the poorest of the poor in Italy. He both preached the Gospel and modeled the love of Jesus in his daily life. He loved each person he met as if they were Jesus Himself. He gave away everything he had—and then some. St. Francis was a radical disciple of Jesus, doing nothing in halves, walking the streets, sleeping in fields, dancing from town to town, preaching about Jesus to everyone who would listen. People from all walks of life came to join him, realizing that no one had ever followed Jesus as deeply and intimately as St. Francis. The poor loved him, the rich sneered at him, the Church was amazed at his devotion and commitment. But through it all, St. Francis became a wonderful example of a man deeply in love with Jesus. The commitment of St. Francis to our Saviour was radical—that's why he is called a Saint. St. Francis loved Jesus with all his heart and soul and mind, just as you are asked to do. If nothing else, St. Francis is an example for us of **personal commitment to Jesus as Saviour and Lord**.

Now, unlike St. Francis, we don't need to give up our home, our job, our family, our possessions to follow Jesus—but we do need to have a personal relationship with Jesus. We need to live in love with Jesus, our Saviour, as St. Francis showed us in his life. If you

haven't made that kind of commitment to Christ yet, please do it now—this morning—before you leave this Church. And if you do, tell me about it at the end of this service.

Three Heroes of the Faith: St. Michael, St. Jerome, and St. Francis. Sept 29th, Sept 30th, and October 4th—special days dedicated to reminding us what these three Saints have to teach us.

St. Michael shows us the importance of **standing firm against the evil** that surrounds us, no matter what the cost.

St. Jerome shows us how to be real—to **practice what we preach**—to have our mouth, our mind, and our hands in harmony with Jesus.

St. Francis shows us how **to live in love with Jesus**, putting Jesus, not at the edge of our lives, but at the very centre. Living each day in love with Jesus—now that's really living.

Three Heroes of the Faith, three Saints who speak to us today, three Goals by which to live. By following their examples, we can learn to live with Jesus—to have life and have it abundantly.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen