

November 4, 2007
All Saints Sunday
Ephesians 1:11-23

(Sniff, sniff). Can you smell that scent in the air? It smells kind of like a winning team in Cleveland. No, no. That is not the smell of the Cleveland Indians snatching defeat out of the jaws of victory against the Boston Red Sox. (I'm still baffled over how that happened.) No. That is the smell of a winning Cleveland Browns team. The Browns are 4-3 on the year. And there's a certain buzz in the air... some people are beginning to talk playoffs. That might be jumping ahead a little bit. We'll have to wait and see. The Browns haven't been to the playoffs in about six years and only once in the last twelve or thirteen years... I lost track. If you're an avid Cleveland Browns fan though, today the air is a little bit fresher. Your shoulders are a little bit lighter. The sun is shining just a little bit brighter.

If you're a Cleveland Browns fan, you've probably heard of the playoffs before. But that's about it. Maybe you have a distant, faint memory of what the playoffs were like. But that distant and faint memory probably isn't a good one being a Browns fan. (John Elway... ugh.) If you're a Browns fan, you've heard of the playoffs before, but it's been a while since you've seen it, at least seeing the Browns in the playoffs. If you're Paul writing to the Ephesians, you've heard about the Ephesians' faith, but it's been a while since you've seen these Ephesian friends of yours.

In our reading from Ephesians, Paul reflects on what he has heard happening with the Ephesians. People were busy talking about the Ephesians and how they were going about sharing Christ's love. If you can imagine ESPN commentators talking and talking about what the church in Ephesus was up to, you might be able to gain a glimpse of the good things that were happening in Ephesus. They're in the newspapers and in magazines. These Ephesians were being talked about by the John Maddens' and Mike Ditkas' of the world. For Paul, it's been a while since he had seen his friends in Ephesus. Paul probably has a distant memory of what the church in Ephesus was like. That was years ago, though. And at this point, there were quite a few people in the church in Ephesus that he had never even met. He's only heard about their faith. He's only heard about their love for Christ and their love for all the saints. And he's heard good things.

It's their love for all the saints that Paul has heard about. Today we celebrate All Saints Sunday. All Saints Sunday is when we remember those saints who have lived out their faith and are, right now, living out their faith. Some of these saints are here with us right now. That's you. You are a saint because of your faith. Some of these saints have entered fully into God's kingdom, fully into God's arms. Some of these saints we know personally. Some of these saints, we've only heard about before.

With all these saints, though, it's their faith that is meant to create a buzz in the air, so that you can hear about the faith of these saints and what these saints are doing or have done in their faith. You can hear about their faith from friends. You can hear about their faith from family. You hear about their faith from co-workers, your dentist, your doctor, your mailman. When we are saints, we're meant to be creating a buzz in the air... creating a buzz in the air about the love Christ has for each of us, the One who makes us a saint to begin with.

It's interesting to me, sometimes, we only get the chance to hear about certain saints. We're sometimes not given the chance to know them. My grandmother was a person whose faith I only ever heard about while I was growing up. She died when I was a little over a year old. I have no memory of her at all. Her faith created a buzz in the air, though. When I was younger, my parents and my older sister would tell me about her, what she was like, how much she loved me. And they still do. They would tell me how much she loved Christ. It was my grandmother's faith that made her a saint. And because they took the time to tell me about my grandmother and the love she had for me, for them, for Christ, it gave me the chance to get to know this particular saint who happened to be my own grandmother. I know my grandmother because of what I have heard about her.

All Saints Sunday is about those saints we know personally... and it's about those saints who we've only heard about in their faith. Some of these saints have gone on to receive their "inheritance in Christ" as Paul calls it – they've received their treasures of heaven. And some of those treasures of heaven sit right in front of us right now. They sit beside us, behind us. Some of these treasures of heaven we know personally. Others we have only gotten the chance to hear about.

In the case of my grandmother, she's a saint who I've only heard about and a saint who has already gone on to inherit her heavenly treasures. But sometimes those who have gone on before us leave some heavenly treasures behind so that we might gain a glimpse of their faith, their faith that made them saints. About six months ago, a package came in the mail. The package was from a great aunt of mine. In the package was a small hardcover booklet. It was old and wearing around the edges. I looked a little closer and it was a copy of the Small Catechism, a booklet confirmation students use while going through catechism. I read the letter and my great aunt was giving this Small Catechism to me as a gift. It turns out that this Small Catechism booklet was my grandmother's booklet she used while she was going through Confirmation classes back in about 1930, the same grandmother who I had only ever heard about. My great aunt had kept it as a memento to remember my grandmother... she had admired my grandma's faith for all these years. And she wanted to pass that Small Catechism onto me.

I opened the booklet and I could see where my grandmother, whose faith I had only heard about, had made little notes to herself in her catechism booklet – where she had underlined certain parts – where she had made little doodles after getting bored in class. I suddenly was able to have a conversation with my grandmother. It was obviously a very incomplete conversation. But I was able to get a glimpse of her in her faith when she was maybe 12 or 13 years old... when so much life was still yet ahead of her... when no one had even come close to thinking about me as a possibility of even walking on this planet. It was obviously an incomplete conversation. I could only gain a glimpse of what her faith was like at her young age. But I was able to hear a little bit more about this saint's faith... the faith that made her a saint... her faith that was still creating a "buzz in the air."

The awesome thing is about All Saints Sunday, is that we know these kinds of incomplete conversations will one day be complete. Paul calls this day the day when Christ "fills all in all." We wait for that day. In the meantime, our faith, our love for Christ and for all the saints is meant to create a buzz in the air. To the John Maddens and Mike Ditkas of the world, take note: People are talking about this Jesus and what he and his saints are up to! Amen.