

Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9
Psalm 24
Revelation 21:1-6a
John 11:32-44

All Saint's Day 2018 St. Stephen's Church Belvedere, CA.
The Rev. Dcn. Alberta Brown Buller

Let it be the Gospel of Christ that is preached and the very word of God that is heard.
Amen.

I confess... I have a guilty pleasure. It's one that I don't get to indulge in as often as I'd like to anymore. Few people other than Dave and my sister, Beverly, know about it but I'll share it with you.

Whenever I have several hours free, I like to set up the iron board with a full basket of wash that needs starching and ironing. Then, I turn on my computer, log into Hulu and I watch back to back episodes ofRiflesman and Rawhide. There is something about that handsome Chuck Connors or the mischievous Rowdy Yates, who is played by a very young Clint Eastwood, that can capture my attention for HOURS. It takes me back... to being a little girl in Connecticut with my father. He'd say, "Little Alberta. Come in here. Let's watch the shoot 'em ups." I'd climb into his big chair with him and we'd watch those old black and white shows together. And why iron? I guess it's because my mother starched and ironed everything. None of us set foot out of our house with out perfectly pressed clothing. She even made her own starch from scratch. Somehow it's rubbed off on me and I find ironing very relaxing and quite therapeutic.

These memories of my late parents is what is sometimes called, plucking a memory out of "thin air". We've all experienced it. Sometimes happens in a moment. Sometimes it happens in a place. But when it happens it feels like the curtain between heaven and earth has become almost transparent, doesn't it? And we feel closer to those whose journey here on earth has ended.

There is an ancient Celtic saying, that goes like this:
"Heaven and earth are only three feet apart."

In the U.K., there are many places that are known as having "thin air". It's not because of a change in altitude or because it's harder to breathe there. No, in thin places, Heaven and Earth seem to feel much closer to each other. The ancients built hedges and rock rings around these places, and used them for worship as well as places to bury their dead.

Christians later built cathedrals, monasteries, cemeteries and churches in these areas. They're called Iona, Stonehenge, Orkney, Glastonbury. To name just a few. When you visit these places, it feels as though you are standing on holy ground. You can feel it in the air. There really is a spiritual bond between us and those in heaven. Or as my friend Stanley says, "those who've gone on to the next village."

So, what is the definition of a saint? Well during the first three centuries, a saint was someone who'd been martyred for their belief in Christ. Later, saints were the religious

heroes of the church. Sometimes chapels or churches were built in their honor. There are two saints who are special to me. St. Stephen, the first martyr of Christianity, who according to the Acts of the Apostles was a deacon in the early church at Jerusalem. His feast day is December 26th. The other is Jonathan Daniels, a former college roommate of Fr. Bill Rankin. We celebrate him on August 14th. And I've brought their icons to show you. Today I'd like to introduce you to a living saint.

Labor Day weekend 2017, I traveled with a group of Deacons to Eureka. We visited with our friend, The Venerable Arch Deacon Pam Gossard and worshipped at Christ Church in Eureka, where Fr. Daniel London has been called.

Pam introduced me to someone you might call remarkable but that word doesn't seem big enough to describe her. Her name is Betty Kwan Chinn. There is talk of making a movie about her life and if you go onto CNN's website, you can read more about her because she's one of the people nominated as the 2018 CNN hero of the year. Betty told me a little of her story. She was born into a large family- 12 children-, in China, to western educated Christian parents-a death sentence for many during The Cultural Revolution.

Betty and her family were ripped from their homes. She was separated from my family and as a small child, lived on the street by herself for a time. She was forced to wear a sign on her neck that said, "I'm a child of the devil." Betty was sent to a prison for 6-9 yr old children, that was adjacent to a cemetery. Imagine. They had prisons, by age, for children.

She said that when she arrived at the prison camp all was silent.

Thousands of young children were there and not a sound. She soon learned why. Betty spoke a few words and was punished in an evil, despicable way. She did not speak again for years.

What the children were given to eat was, I can only say, disgusting and inhumane. Prison life may have been breaking down her body but not her inner spirit or her faith. With help she escaped and found her way to Humboldt County.

Eventually she married a professor who taught at Humboldt State and started a family. When her son began elementary school, Betty would send him off with a lunch.

One day he asked his mother if she would make a bigger lunch for him. She asked him why. He said it was for a girl in his class.

Her son had been sharing his lunch with her.

The girl's family didn't have the money to send her with a lunch so Betty provided her with one every day. She decided to find out more about this family and discovered that they lived in their car.

She found the family and took the time to get to know them. She began cooking a little more each night and bringing them dinner. Soon other families living in their cars began lining up for dinner too, so just Betty cooked more food.

Volunteers heard about Betty's efforts and began to help.

Betty was given support from the community and was able to open the Betty Kwan Chinn Center, in downtown Eureka. Upstairs, a place is provided, dormitory style-for homeless families, so that they can stay together.

Downstairs-there are computers and counselors available to help with resume writing and interview skills. There's a clothes closet for finding clothes to wear on interviews or to work.

There is also a container village where people live inside of shipping containers for up to 18 months. You must be sober while

living there and you must be seeking employment.

Betty and her volunteers bring them 3 meals a day.

A variety of classes are held, in a large pavilion on the property.

Betty has met many of the great heroes of our time, too many to name but I'll tell you a few stories she shared with me.

I noticed an exquisite set of sanctus bells in her office.

Betty told me that when she was at the Vatican, meeting Pope Francis, she noticed the bells and told the Pope they were very beautiful.

A few weeks passed and a package arrived from Vatican City.

Inside were the bells.

She also told me about that "nice little Irish musician" who was so sweet to her. My friend Pam told me that was Bono from U2.

She was honored by President Obama at the White House and Pam tells me he still calls her to check in and say, "hi".

Betty may not know it, and she would never say it, but for me she is truly great among us. For me she is a living saint.

Today, let us remember all the saints we've known and thank God for bringing them into our lives.

Bring out the old photo albums and talk with the younger ones about the people in them.

Thin the air a little and bring them back closer to you. Bring them alive for those who never knew them.

And may we be a blessing to all those in our lives who will be talking about us and remembering us one day.

For more on Betty Kwan Chinn:

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/04/us/cnnheroes-betty-chinn-betty-kwan-chinn-homeless-foundation/index.html>

<https://www.bettychinn.org/recognition.html>