

“A Good Day to Die ... a Good Day to Live”

Saint Clifford. That’s right, you heard me Saint Clifford. You are no doubt reacting like my siblings, family, friends, and all who know me – mumbling under your breath, “he’s no saint!”

It’s true, Clifford Schildt did not live a sinless life – but that’s not what a “saint” is. A saint is a “holy one.” Still objecting? That’s because you are thinking in a worldly way and not the way that God uses the term “saint.”

Biblically, a saint is a “holy one” – not one who is holy in themselves – but one who is made holy by Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ washed away all of Clifford’s sin in Holy Baptism and made him to be a child of God – just as He promises.

Clifford is a saint (a holy one), because he lives by faith in Jesus Christ who makes him holy even now.

Clifford died on November 1st which is the day that the Church celebrates the Feast of All Saints – a day of rejoicing in all the saints, those on earth, and those in heaven – all who are united to Jesus Christ by faith.

I remember saying to my wife when I told her that Clifford had died that day, All Saints’ Day --- “this is a good day to die.” It’s a good day to die – and a good day to live.

In our Bible reading from Philippians 1, the Apostle Paul is writing “to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi ... grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul writes this letter to his fellow believers while he is sitting in a prison cell in Rome. Yet, he expresses hope, saying – “that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Everyday for the Christian is a good day to die – and a good day to live. Either way, Christ will be honored. Paul says that he is “hard pressed.” On the one hand, he desires to depart (that is, to die) and be with Christ (in heaven), “for that is far better” – but on the other hand, “to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.”

For Paul, for Clifford, and for all the saints – to live by faith in Jesus Christ is to honor Him. It is to confess that my life is in your hands Lord – you decide whether this is a good day for me to live, or to die.

This family, like many others, were “hard pressed” when they – along with Clifford – had to make decisions on whether to continue treatments and medical assistance – or, to let things play out according to the Lord’s will.

Regardless of our decisions – our lives are always in the Lord’s hands – and it was His desire to take Clifford to his heavenly home last Wednesday, on All Saints’ Day.

For the Apostle Paul, it was the Lord’s will that he would go on living for a time – for the sake of the believers in Philippi and others – so that in his life, Paul might serve them.

The Lord gave Clifford 77 years full of days to live, and serve others – and so he did – living by faith in Jesus Christ, and serving his fellow man. Each day was one to awaken and look around and see whom the Lord had given him to serve.

Clifford was always ready to jump in and help out – to serve his neighbor. He was a long time usher here at Immanuel – and when we were short an usher, he’d be right there to help out.

He was right there to help out – whether that meant serving meals each week to the Senior diners – serving soup or pancake with the men’s group – or when the season was right, to help the farmer in the fields.

The Lord had good use for Clifford – and Clifford honored Christ with his life – living in faith toward God, and in love for his neighbor.

There is another aspect to this saying that “every day is a good day to die a good day to live.” For the Christian who is baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection – there is a daily death and resurrection.

The daily life of the baptized is one of contrition and repentance – continually confessing our sins, crucifying the sinful flesh, and putting to death all evil desires – and Christ, by His gracious forgiveness, resurrecting the new man who lives by faith.

Daily Clifford was put to death, and resurrected to a new life – resurrected a new man St. Clifford. Each day was a day to live as one set free from sin and death. Each day a day to honor Christ by living in faith – and by using his life to serve others. That’s how the child of God lives – believing that one’s life is fully dependent upon God and His mercy shown to us in His Son, Christ Jesus our Lord.

Such was Clifford’s life – and this is the life that God calls each one of you to live. What a wonderful life that is – a life of freedom, not fear – a life that truly believes what God’s Word says – “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Thanks be to God for the life He has given to Clifford. Thanks be to Jesus Christ that He has conquered death and the grave – so that all who believe in Him might live eternally.

For Clifford, and for all the saints – each day is a good day to die a good day to live. Today is not a day of death for Clifford – because he lives – with Christ and the Father and the Holy Spirit for all eternity.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.