

**Good Samaritan Episcopal Church, Sammamish, WA Suzi Robertson
The Feast Day of St. Nicholas
December 6, 2009**

Being in the midst of the Advent season and being bombarded on every side with Christmas decorations, Christmas cards, Christmas parties and Christmas food is sometimes overwhelming. We have an opportunity today to stop for a moment and reflect in a joyful way on one of the greatest of all Saints. He was a man who was so great that it is hard to believe he is real.

Over a period of several years, I have done a great deal of research on this most interesting saint. The best way to study him is on the internet. If you do an internet search on him, today – you will find that there are 9,030,000 entries on him. Some are icons, etc., but his legacy is widely published. In Great Britain alone, over 500 Church of England (Anglican) churches are named after the beloved Saint. Why? What is it about St. Nicholas that puts him at the top of the list of Saints and right up there with our Lady and the other great Saints.

The stories of Nicholas are many. They cover everything from mystically providing dowry money for three women in distress who were to be sold into prostitution if their father did not raise enough funds for dowry. Up on the housetop, Nicholas drops in gold coins to save them from this fate worse than death. Another of the stories is the incredible restoring to life three boys who were being pickled during a time of great famine to be sold for food. Nicholas wanders through the woods and comes by the butcher's inn and restores the boys to health.

It is recorded that Nicholas slapped Arius at the Council of Nicaea, for declaring that Jesus was both divine and human. Might this be the reason the church elevated him to such high status. Or maybe it is because Nicholas symbolizes that which is at the heart of our Christian faith, which is the ability to give, to give and to give again. To love, to love, and to love again. And to care, to care and to care again.

As we look at the lives of Saints< Nicholas holds up for us an example how God can use us when we least expect it. Nicholas being chosen as a Bishop came as complete surprise to him as he entered the Cathedral of Myra and was pointed out by an elderly churchman as the next bishop. Nicholas was a wealthy man and yet he realized to have true wealth was to give away all that he could. I am sure Saint Francis of Assisi and other great Saints were influenced by his example. He gave his all to the Church. Oh, that we had more bishops like Nicholas, today. Bishops that we could hold our heads up high and acclaim as true humanitarians. Bishops who are faithful to their people. Nicholas was not a person who sought recognition, as a good person does not need to seek recognition because people will be so eager and so willing to tell the good news that they experienced through the administrations of someone like St. Nicholas.

I have often criticized the commercialization of Christmas. But, as I was preparing this manuscript, I began to wonder about some things. You know when you hear the carols wafting through the stores. When you see nativity sets and crèche scenes on the street corners and you see people rushing about. Remember whether they realize it or not, they are celebrating the birth of Christ. Their way of doing it may not be the way we want them to do, but the reality is you can not take the Christ out of Christmas. Nicholas helps us understand more clearly because in reality the notion of Santa Claus need not be a

competitive spirit within our existence as Christians in this world, but one that complements and helps us in our celebrations. That is why I believe that every church should celebrate the Feast Day of St. Nicholas, not just those named for him but for Churches throughout the Anglican Communion.

Let's not let the tradition of Nicholas falter; let us restore it with great enthusiasm. Let us realize that Santa Claus belongs to our Christian family. Let us not be shy not know that the reality is that Santa Claus is truly our Saint Nicholas.

Nicholas is revered to this day and there is great work of restoration being done at is Church in Myra, Turkey – where some of our own youth and adults took their pilgrimage, last summer. Let us remember the work of the Santa Claus Foundation in Antalya, Turkey, that is trying through many ways to restore the Church and bring back a sense of devotion and praying for peace in that part of the world.

Nicholas is truly a patron saint for all of us. He is patron of Russia, Aberdeen, Scotland, Greece, seafarers, pawnbrokers with their symbol of three balls, children. Patron of so many things, but let him be patron of all Christians who want to – through the giving of gifts, giving of elf, giving of love – seek to be more like Christ and to administer his love to those in our lives. May we be faithful, as Nicholas was faithful, and may we take time at this Christmas and every Christmas to share with our family, friends and children the true story behind Santa Claus.

So, join with me and all the children for the enthusiasm for Nicholas; join with me in enthusiasm for this great time of the year. Be thankful for the stores and all the carrying on that they do. Obviously, we remember those who are not able to join into the spirit of this season and those who find this a time of depression and anxiety. But, with that in mine, let us make even more or a commitment to be more caring and loving in all that we do, in Christ's name, and in the name of the Great St. Nicholas. Amen!