
“A MAN CALLED SAINT”

Ninety years ago it was that a child was born.


He was a saint even from the day of his birth. Not by any religious ritual, and his parents did not have unusual foresight. Or perhaps they did. Because you see, they named this child St. Paul. And the next ninety years would be spent fully living up to this distinctive and entirely apt designation.


The child grew up with a thirst for knowledge. Severe poverty, the racism of his southern birthplace, the death of his father early in his life, and the rough and tumble surroundings of his hometown. None of these could stop the young St. from climbing ever upward and onward. Books helped. Kind teachers with an eye for a special young man helped. The encouragement of family members, especially two tough aunts who so strongly believed in education, helped.

Hard work helped. But nothing helped more than his desire for knowledge and his belief that education could lead him to higher ground. And so he studied hard, learned well, and provided himself with the tools to move up and out in a way that many others in his immediate surroundings never found.

This led to honors in school and a college education. And this was still somewhat rare for a Black man, even a saint, from his economic background at the time. He opened new schools and found ways to integrate others. And before long, the saint was conferred with certificates and titles that lived up to his name. And he lived up to them. And so he became Rev. St. Paul Epps.
A man of divinity indeed.

He led small churches in Southern states. And then, a mission called him to the “wild frontiers” of a state called California. Building a church for a community with the beautiful and well chosen name, Bel Vue. From a tiny garage, the church grew to a literal white and shining mission.....And the St.’s miraculous vision was fulfilled and his heart rewarded with a congregation that was strong, devoted, progressive, and proud!





The nation noticed. And at a time of extreme racial unrest, this St. was called to a leadership position in his church. He journeyed to the “Vatican on the Hudson”, the national headquarters of his chosen denomination. And there he filled positions of stewardship, self-development and self-determination, and leadership with great eloquence, grace, intelligence and even more divinity. What a supernal career. What a heavenly life of service.

And with all of this divinity, there was also a personal life of great challenges and great rewards. A marriage to a strong partner that has lasted longer than many lives. Parenting three children with love, dedication, and sometimes when needed the “tough love” that the best fathers are not afraid to share. And somehow, he still had enough guidance, affection, advice, kindness, and generosity left over to give to “all his children”, including extended family, friends, students, grandchildren, sisters, brothers, cousins, aunts, uncles, in-laws, and all the rest. The family of this saint is vast, far reaching, and ever grateful that his light has touched all of our lives.

Retirement seems an odd word to describe the later life of this man who never seemed tired. Even after the “official” career was over, he continued to share his gifts with more churches, more congregations, and more students. He was on the road every Sunday to preach at a church that needed the words of a pastor. He was on even longer roads to offer wisdom and experience throughout the country. He was on the road to higher ground as he continued his spiritual journey. Always moving ever onward and upward like a strong eagle with the wind of his faith beneath his wings. He kept soaring ever upward long past the time when most men have settled down and settled in. But he had “promises to keep, and miles to go before his sleep.” He’s still on that road....Still moving on!

It would not be at all surprising that it should take many, many years to make a saint. Perhaps even ninety years. But this saint, our St. Paul, was delivered to us by the grace of God on the day of his birth, ninety years ago. That has given us only slightly less than a century to bask in the wonders of his kindness, his vivacity, his knowledge, his wit, his warmth and his love.

Perhaps his greatest gift of all has been his very presence on this earth. We have all been so blessed by that gift. We have only one small request of him....Keep shining like the St. you are for another 90 years!

