

Topic: Called to be Saints

Subtopic: Our heavenly calling awakens hope and high aspirations

Video URL: <https://youtu.be/8JNbcDBoHRk>

The celebration of All Saints Day is a time to reflect on the host of characters that have inspired the Church through the ages. But we also remember on this day the unsung service of those whose names are known to God alone but who comprise the vast majority of God's faithful people. Most of us probably do not think of ourselves as saints, and certainly not as holy ones. However we may feel about ourselves, the New Testament classifies every baptized believer as a saint, the pious and the not-so-pious.

When Saint John saw the host of heaven "from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands,"¹ he was asked this question, "***Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?***"²

That is an excellent question that takes some Biblical exploration. The word saint comes from the same Greek word for those who are "called to be holy."³ Strong's concordance explains that the core meaning of the word for *holy* is "different,"⁴ and it implies something or someone "set apart." In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul explains that we have been "chosen in Christ, ...adopted as his children," and "set apart for good works."⁵ But the path toward such blessedness is not all sweetness and light.

The saints that John saw in the Book of Revelation came

¹ Revelation 7:9

² Revelation 7:13

³ 1 Corinthians 1:2

⁴ Strong's Concordance, # 40 "hágios" – different (unlike), other ("otherness"), holy; implies something "set apart" and therefore "different from the world."

⁵ See Ephesians 1:4-5 and 2:10

out of “the great tribulation.”⁶ Saints throughout the ages have experienced trials of many kinds. The context reveals that “the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water.”⁷

Our Psalm today speaks of how he found living water by handling his fears constructively. As he faced overwhelming circumstances, he announced his intention to always bless the LORD. Then he tells how he “sought the Lord and was delivered out of all of his fears.”⁸

The world and our country face many adverse winds, which cause fear and uncertainty. In my own experience, I have seen how fears can cause certain parts of the brain to freeze up and shut down. As a child, I was very fearful and insecure. The world seemed scary and overwhelming. As I grew older, I learned that fears are a part of life. I also learned that “faith doesn’t cancel out fears, but offers a way, not over, under or around, but through our fears to life and joy.”⁹ The Psalmist today shows us one of the ways to handle those fears is to join others in prayers and praises. We must keep our minds and thoughts focused on God, who is still in control and is working all things together for our good. He is confident that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of Christ,¹⁰ “for if God be for us, who can be against us.”¹¹

So, what makes a saint? I love the answer a little boy once gave to that question as he looked up at a stained glass window in his Church and said, “A saint is someone who lets the light shine through.” His answer is critical as we face dark times.

⁶ See Revelation 7: 14 The Greek word for “tribulation” is word that describes persecution, affliction, distress in life’s pressures that “hem someone in” and leaves them “without options (Strong’s Concordance, #2347 “thipsis”

⁷ Revelation 7:17

⁸ Psalm 34:4

⁹ Quote by Richard White, pastor in Montreat, NC

¹⁰ Romans 8:28,

¹¹ Romans 8:31

Therefore, the image we think about when we think of saints is a little more down to earth than we may have previously thought, as the Beatitudes that Jesus delivered on the Sermon on the Mount illustrate. They embody a composite picture of what it means to be a saint in today's world. They are the blessed due to being poor in spirit. In their humility, they realize they have little to offer God and have no temptation to boast of what they have or are. Therefore, to everyone's great surprise, these poor, ordinary folk are qualified for the kingdom of God. The difficulties they have encountered have driven them to hunger and thirst for righteousness and created in them attitudes that Jesus calls blessed.

The call to be a saint is no easy business. Jesus said, "For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."¹²

The late, legendary Andy Rooney was the witty and grumpy journalist who gave us the 60 Minute TV commentaries. He may not have been regarded as a saint, but he gave us some sound advice for that difficult, straight-and-narrow road when he said, "Everyone wants to live on top of the mountain, but all the happiness and growth occurs while you're climbing it." He also gave some practical advice that would help guard against "a more holy than thou" attitude when He said, "Always keep your words soft and sweet, just in case you have to eat them."

So, let's begin our journey toward this blessed life by acknowledging our spiritual poverty. Our religion does not make us better than others. The people who have been an inspiration to me are those who, while acknowledging their humanness, daily rely on the grace of God. People who know where they are spiritually poor are surprisingly attractive and blessed. Our need

¹² Matthew 7:14

for daily grace does not give our ego a blowout. On the contrary, it causes you to be a person of such emotional and intellectual integrity that people end up trusting you.

So, what is it that makes a saint? Should our lives be marked by heroic deeds of service? Such grandeur is most often not the case. An old Zen Buddhist proverb goes, “Before enlightenment, I chopped wood and carried water; after enlightenment, I chopped wood and carried water.”¹³ In other words, before enlightenment, we may have seen our daily tasks as burdensome or meaningless, but after enlightenment, we see them as opportunities for growth and service. The message is that enlightenment is not a destination but a journey that continues throughout our lives.

The people who can be sure of a blessed future are humble, mourning, merciful, and forgiving. They have a passion for what is pure and hunger and thirst for what is right. They are involved with the vulnerable and hurting and make peace. They believe in the sin that resides not only in others but also in themselves. These are the ones who put the seasoning into life and light the way by what they do and how they react.

In our epistle lesson today, the Apostle John tells us, “Behold what manner of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are.”¹⁴ If you “believe that Jesus is the Christ, then you have been born of God.”¹⁵ As God’s children, we are called to imitate our Heavenly Father, who is holy. The Apostle Peter wrote in his first epistle, “As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.”¹⁶ “God is at work in us, equipping us with everything good that we may do his will.”¹⁷ To Him be all the glory. Amen.

¹³ www.wildsimplejoy.com/enlightenment

¹⁴ 1 John 3:1-2

¹⁵ 1 John 5:1

¹⁶ 1 Peter 1:15

¹⁷ Hebrews 13:21