

How Saints Are Made
(All Saints Day/ Trinity XXIII)

All Saints Day Collect:

O ALMIGHTY God, who hast knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord; Grant us grace so to follow thy blessed Saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys which thou hast prepared for those who unfeignedly love thee; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

All Saints Day Epistle:

After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four living creatures, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

What is the position of the Saints in heaven? Those who have been tried and tested, and yet through “faith and patience” have “overcome” and “endured until the end”. It is a picture of those who are at rest after their labors on earth. They have worked hard toward a certain end. They have expended themselves. They have won a victory. They have stood against an enemy and have prevailed. Endurance. Faith. Action. Perseverance. A stubborn refusal to give up. Persistence. Those awaiting a crown, a reward; a goal reached, a finish line crossed, a race run...

Observe that such a heroic group, whose battle-scarred lives are a testimony to the reality of their struggle, and who in a very real sense have earned the applause and accolades of Heaven, observe to Whom they readily ascribe credit for their victory: “...they cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord...” (Rev. 4:10b-11a).

So, that’s who *they* are. But what of *us*? To what are we called --you and I-- that we might join them unashamed on that Day? What crown are we working toward? What gift can our lives be for the Savior? What will we have to boast of? Is it even possible for us to hope for such things, here in modern America? In the midst of our ease and comfort, what afflictions for Christ’s sake can we claim? What has exacted a toll upon us for the sake of the Gospel?

This is indeed a difficult question. Elsewhere in the world today we can only guess what some of our Christian brethren are undergoing for their faith. We are aware of persecution in Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist lands, and where the remnants of communism still hold sway, as in China, Cuba, or North Korea. We may be inclined to look at our own situation with dismay or anxiety: “Lord, why did You place me here these circumstances, and in such times?”. As the old hymn puts it (*Am I A Soldier of the Cross?*):

“Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease
While others fought to win the prize, and sailed through bloody seas?
Are there no foes for me to face? Must I not stem the flood?
Is this vain world a friend to grace, to help me on to God?”

It is indeed the Lord who is responsible for our placement. It couldn't be otherwise. But what are we to do? Our comforts tend to put us to sleep. We cling to them; we love and cherish them, we must admit, and for this we often feel more than a tad guilty. But none of us wishes to hate the good things that God has given us. We would think it ridiculous to punish ourselves simply because our challenges seem to be minuscule and few compared to those of other ages and places, where the battle against Christ's enemies appears more obvious, with much more at stake, where the clash of arms is loud and strong, and the casualties much easier to count. Few of us feel called to the kind of voluntary poverty and self-denial that some have undertaken, as a response.

What indeed are we to do to live the lives of saints today? How can we respond to our age in such a manner as to please God? What is our cross? What is our mission?

Most if not all of you have indeed endured adversity associated with your church commitments. You've stepped away from large churches, from the smiles, pleasure, and approval of others and of the community; from the security of numbers, from the ease of conformity, from all of the advantages of putting comfort above convictions, in order to arrive at the place you are at among “traditional Anglicans”. This is no small step. And the maintenance of yourselves in this mode that you have been driven to by your Christian consciences has not been easy.

To nobly endure disappointments and violations of trust are indeed a victory for God, who neither forgets nor fails to notice. They are afflictions endured for the sake of a higher end. The option of cutting and running always exists for any of us. We can always declare, “I've had enough!” and walk off the stage.

Life will continue to exact a great deal from us. But will we interpret its ups and downs in the light of faith? How we react to our circumstances, how we process them, what we do with them, constitute a proving ground for each of us. Therein is sainthood formed. But is it really possible that my little life with its small concerns, its tiny tempests, its meager persecutions, its relatively staid, unruffled, untroubled existence should yield anything of everlasting value?

Faith is the transformative agent that changes what would otherwise be the prosaic into the genuinely transcendent. It is faith that makes the way I treat my wife, my family, my friends, my job, my time, and everything else into an offering to God. To the extent that my life is lived in faith, with a heart toward God, doing my best to obey Him in all circumstances... to that extent my small, unimportant, unknown, and insignificant life will take on the trappings of sainthood.

What does the saint look for first of all in the morning, resting at his bedside, just where he had left it the night before? It is a simple, rugged, wooden thing. What will that cross involve? On most of his days, the vast majority of them, in the ordinary, the tedious and the repetitive and uninteresting, it will be the *way* that he meets the requirements of each moment. Not the *fact* that he meets them, because that is a reality shared by all; it is the *way*, the *manner*, in which they are met.

So what would such a sainted life today look like? How can I identify it today?

Homes dedicated to Christ, in which He is the principle Guest. All of life hallowed to His service. Continual effort to transform all the moments of waking existence by yielding them to Him: whether it be casual interactions with loved ones, ordinary tasks under ordinary circumstances, business on the phone or in person, in pleasure, in work, in leisure, in hardship. The saint does not retain just about all the substance of his life for himself, resenting the presence of God as an intrusion, only with reluctance granting Him a bit of attention once or twice a week, more for the sake of appearances than devotion. Here the making of the saint begins, and it is in heaven where the process reaches fulfillment.

Watch the saint for a moment. Notice how the simplest things in his or her life somehow become acts of devotion. There seems to be nothing in his life that is deprived of meaning. Even his times of rest are suffused with God's peace. Even her most public occasions, when many eyes observe her, are characterized by humility and grace. Our jaws fall open in wonder: we cannot believe that it is possible for life --all of life-- to be thus dignified.

What if I were to assert to you that the calling of sainthood for you and me is merely to hold the ground that God has given us to occupy? That sounds rather simple and basic, perhaps even rather passive, doesn't it? But I want us to look through spiritual eyes. If a soldier

is given a position in an arena of warfare, and told to hold it at all costs, his duty, night and day, week in and week out, year by year, remains the same. The success of the army of which he is only one unit is utterly dependent upon each one living up to his individual duty, and no more. Your assignment is just as crucial as mine, and neither of us can exchange positions.

I suspect God keeps the magnitude and nature of the battle largely hidden from us, because we do not possess the capacity to view it. But be assured that the vast host of heaven, including those who have passed on from this earth, many of them heroes in the faith, are scrutinizing the entire theater of conflict from a vantage point that allows them to see the whole and the part. Do they see us alert, on our guard, awake, watchful, aware of the significance of our calling and actions? Or do they see impairment, our minds and hearts so full of the noise of this life that we are barely functional? Be assured that we are on display.

This is our call, I believe, and the key to our joining some day the ranks of the victorious which have gone on before. Few of us, it seems, are appointed to martyrdom, or extreme Christian suffering. But all of us possess the potential to take the stuff of our lives and turn it into something of everlasting beauty and value.

And if we are faithful in that small amount we've received, who knows... perhaps we'll be given more.

Let us encourage one another constantly toward this kind of attainment. it is real. It is valid. It is commendable. It is genuine.

“Sure I must fight if I would reign; increase my courage, Lord;
I'll bear the cross, endure the pain, supported by Thy word.
The saints, in all this glorious war, shall conquer, though they die;
They view the triumph from afar, and seize it with their eye.
When that illustrious day shall rise, and all thy armies shine
In robes of victory through skies, the glory shall be thine.”