

All Saints Sunday  
November 7, 2010  
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*Scriptures: Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18; Psalm 149; Ephesians 1:11-23; Luke 6:20-31*

## **We Are the Saints**

I've told this story before. I have no idea if it's true or not, but it's a good one to waste, so here it goes. This is about two brothers whose lives were characterized more by what you should not do than by setting good examples for others. They were engaged in many vices like gambling, alcohol and others. Their unorthodox business landed them with a lot of money which also gave them power to buy their way around problems.

But time goes by and there's nothing money can do about that. So it came the time when the older brother died. There wasn't a whole lot of grief around town when that happened, but his younger brother wanted to make sure that his sibling had an appropriate eulogy for his funeral. The problem was finding a minister who was willing to say something good about him. As he had done many times before, he thought his money could get him what he wanted. Knowing that one of the local churches was in the midst of a capital campaign for some much needed repairs, the younger brother called upon minister.

"Reverend," he said, "I know my brother and I are not exactly your usual goody-two-shoes. I also know that you probably have heard plenty of not-so-good-things about us. And I also know that we have never exactly been devoted Christians. Nevertheless, I'd like you to do my brother's funeral. And if you'll say he was a saint, I'll write you a check for \$50,000 dollars. That'll go along way to fixing up the church." After some thought and spiritual wrangling, the pastor agreed to do the service. However, he would only do it under one condition: the \$50,000 had to be paid in advance. The younger brother thought that was odd, but this was a "man of the cloth" so he decided to go along with him.

On the day of the funeral, the church was crowded. Not everybody was there to pay their respects; some actually went to make sure he was really dead. Yet many others were there just because they were curious what the pastor would say about a man who had lived a "bad" life. There were the usual scriptures, hymns and everything else expected at a regular service. And then came the time for the main course, the sermon. The pastor started speaking about the usual stuff: condolences to the family, assurance of God's love, and all the common language. But then he also went speaking about the horrible things the rich man had done in his life. He was selfish, greedy, corrupt, caring about no one but himself, drinking, gambling, and on and on...

The younger just couldn't believe what was happening, but what could he do? He just sat there hoping that the pastor would stick to his end of the deal. Finally, after about ten minutes of a laundry list of the man's sins and flaws, the pastor concluded his sermon saying: "Yes my brothers and sister, this man was a no-good, dirty, rotten scoundrel! But compared to his brother, he was a saint!"

Who do you think of when you think of a saint? Many people will think of St. Peter, or St. Paul, or Mary, or one of the other biblical saints. Other people will tend to think of St. Francis, or St. Ignatius, or St. Catherine or any other from the Roman Catholic calendar. In other words, our thoughts go to those that have been declared saints by the church. Those who have had stellar lives and who have gone through an exhaustive process to be declared memorable and worthy to be praised and imitate.

And yet, here we are celebrating all Saints Sunday, so my question to you is, what are you celebrating?

You know, it is true that those that the universal church has declared to be saints indeed are. But when we get down to it, these extraordinary Christians are not really so unique. In fact, it'd be more correct that their unusual lives are more common than we realize. Because sainthood is something we all share. Sainthood comes from the faith we all have received ever since we went through the waters of baptism. Sainthood is something that has less to do with the great things you do and more with the great things God has done.

Take for example how Paul addresses many of his letters as we find them today in the Bible. He applies the word saint without much distinction to those who believe in Jesus and who look to live out their faith as best as they can. So he says in his letter to the Ephesians: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus." And when he writes to the Romans he dedicates his letter saying, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, to all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints." And finally and most telling, to the church in Corinth he opens his letter, "Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours."

You see, saints are all around us; people who are holy, people who are set apart, people who have been born out of baptism to believe and follow Jesus. I'm not saying that they are extraordinary out of what they do, but they are extraordinary because they live out their faith. Saints are normal people. They struggle, they question themselves; they even sin. But they also look to find forgiveness and redemption out of the only source they can trust. They have come to believe that they can only find that in Jesus Christ.

We are called to be saints. We are saints. We are a holy people. We've been set apart. That's what God has done in us. The miracle of sainthood happens in us through the power of God. And because it is the power of God in us, the only thing we can do is reflect on what God has done. A saint is a person in whom you see God's reflection. He or she does not shine with their own light; they shine because God's light is in them.

So there it is. We are saints because Christ is in us. We are saints because so God has wanted us to be. We are saints because, undeserved as it may be, God loves us and declares us his own. When we celebrate All Saints Day, we are celebrating that love, compassion and mercy – the gifts of faith and grace that God has instituted in us. That's what All Saints Day is about. About celebrating what God has done for us in us, through his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.