

All Saints Day
Oct 30th 2022
Ephesians 1:11 to end

Today is All Saints Day, well actually it is on Tuesday, but we celebrate it in Church on the nearest Sunday. It is the day when we remember all the Saints. I think we have become a little fuzzy about what we mean by the word Saint. Today we mostly use it in two extremes and lose it's true meaning along the way. Firstly, and quite rightly, just about every denomination has designated some people to be distinguished with the title of Saint. For some this is reserved solely for the Apostles in the Bible, Saint Matthew, St Thomas etc. In some denominations it is barely used in this context at all and would only ever be used for the writers of the Gospels and for Paul. The Catholic Church in particular venerates all sorts of people after they have died, I am not getting into the ins and outs of the practices of our brothers and sisters in other denominations, but the public generally would regard certain people as Saints – can you think of any examples from the 20th century? (*Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King, Oscar Romero*).

At the other extreme the word Saint has become devalued in the everyday way that we use it. “That woman is a saint”, or “that man is a saint” we might say of someone who we think puts up with a lot from their spouse. And there are other people who we casually bestow the title upon. Any examples?

(*nurses, doctors, paramedics etc*). Although we might not call them saints there are others who because of their popularity and having died tragically we elevate and revere – the obvious examples would be JFK and Princess Diana.

The word Saint, as I am sure you all know comes from Sanctus in Latin, or agios in Greek and it simply means Holy. In the bible it is used in different ways. We call God Holy – the song that is sung around the throne of God for all eternity is the song we say or sing when we celebrate Communion – the Sanctus, Holy,

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Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty. It is used for objects that are set apart to be used to worship God. We sometimes talk about the Holy Table because it is a table set apart and used especially in our worship. The table isn't intrinsically holy, it is made Holy by its use. Hold on to that thought.

Paul is quite clear in his use of the word Saint, he is referring to all those who profess faith in Jesus, all those who seek to follow Jesus and therefore belong to Him. And that includes you and me. Now I don't know about you, but I don't often feel especially Holy, quite the opposite in fact. And the people that Paul was writing to, who he calls Saints were by no means holy in what we would think of as holy, sometimes their behaviour was pretty awful, especially the saints in Corinth. We do not have any intrinsic holiness of our own, any more than that table does. But we are made holy, because we have been called by God, each and everyone of us. And those of us who have answered that call, whether we have been Christians all of our lives, or only came to faith yesterday, whether our behaviour is saintly or whether we still have a long way to go, we are all made Holy because we have been set apart for God. We are His and it is He that makes us Holy. However, unlike the table we can grow in Holiness as we follow Jesus and live that set apart life that He has called us to.

The Gospel reading today is part of the beatitudes – the blessed, and it talks about how we need to live our lives in humility and submission to the needs of others. This is not about being a doormat and letting people walk all over us, but choosing to put the needs of others first. For some of us that comes more easily than to others.

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But I want to focus on what St Paul says about what it means to be a saint in our reading from Ephesians. The first part of Ephesians one Paul gives praise to God for all that He has done for us in Jesus, saving us from our sins and adopting us into His family, regarding us as and treating us as beloved sons and daughters. In the second part, which we have heard today, Paul is telling them about how he is praying for them. It is important for us to remember that praise and prayer should not only go together but need to be held in balance in the Christian life. We need to remember who God is, remember to praise Him for who He is and for what He has done for us – thanksgiving should always be a part of our praise, whether we praise Him in spoken words or in singing. The liturgies that we use, as well as the hymns that we sing are part of that praise and thanksgiving. And having praised Him, acknowledged Him as our God and King and humbled ourselves before Him, then we are invited to be with Him, to sit with Him and talk with Him about those things which are on our heart. As I was writing this, I was reminded of how the Prime Minister, when he or she goes in to see the King, bows or curtseys first to acknowledge the authority of who it is he or she has come to see, and then they are invited to sit and talk with the King. Fortunately, God never says to us, “back again? Oh dear oh dear.” He is always delighted when we choose to come to Him and talk with Him.

Paul didn't know the Ephesians, he had only heard about them, but he was encouraged by what he had heard and he was praying faithfully for them as well as teaching them more about a set apart life through his letter and his example. And this letter is as much for us as it was for the Ephesians. Paul tells us that when we believe, when we come to faith, God marks us with a seal. In

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the ancient world, you marked your property with a seal, in the same way that today some people mark what belongs to them in indelible ink. God does not use wax or indelible ink, but instead gives us Himself, He marks us with the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit and He does this to the praise of His glory! This simply means that the life He plans for us is one spent praising and glorifying Him by the way that we live. Paul goes on to pray that the eyes of our hearts may be opened so that we might understand the hope to which He has called us. That hope is that we might share in the inheritance of being His holy, set apart people. And that we might understand that the same power of the Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, is in us. The power that raised Jesus to be seated at the right hand of the Father far above all rule and authority, power and dominion and set Him as the head over everything for our sakes, because we are His body here on earth, that power of the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives! And that makes us Holy, that whether we feel like it or not makes us Saints. So remember today the Saints that have gone before us, that great cloud of witnesses, remember the Saints of faith that have touched your lives – there are many who I am grateful to, older brothers and sisters in faith, and sometimes younger ones. But remember as well, not only that you are a Saint, set apart for God, but that your brothers and sisters around you here and around the world are also Saints and be like Paul, pray faithfully for them.