

Title: Called To Be Saints

Subtitle: Finding encouragement through fellowship with others

Video URL: <https://youtu.be/hpc-Ylp5M7c>

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 the multitude of saints in history that “could not be numbered.”<sup>1</sup> Those whose names are known to God alone but who comprise the vast majority of God’s faithful people, which includes you and me.

Most of us probably do not think of ourselves as saints, and certainly not as holy ones. But however we may feel about ourselves, the New Testament classifies every baptized believer as a saint, the pious and the not-so-pious. The Good News is that we have been made, are being made, and shall be made holy by the grace of God in Christ Jesus. This is a very challenging concept for most of us to accept, yet this is who we are. It may seem like a paradox that someone as sinful as we know ourselves to be could be called holy, yet it is true nonetheless. The Apostle Paul calls it a mystery; furthermore, he says, “It is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”<sup>2</sup> And honestly, we need help to take hold of this high and holy calling. For this reason, God has given others to us in Christ’s body to help us. Our Prayer Book informs us that we are “...*encouraged by their examples, aided by their prayers, and strengthened by their fellowship*, so that we may also be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.”<sup>3</sup> This tells us that we are not meant to live the Christian life alone.

One of the most pointed examples of this was illustrated to me when I saw a documentary on the life of Bill Watson, the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous. He was someone who was humble enough to

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 7:9

<sup>2</sup> Colossians 1:27

<sup>3</sup> BCP p 489 & 504 –Additional Prayers for Burial

admit his weakness and propensity to abuse alcohol. One day, when he was tempted to take another drink, he called a church and spoke with the minister. In that conversation he said: “I am an alcoholic from New York. I’m in a bad way. I’m not drunk, but I may get that way. I got to have another drunk to work on.” (This was something of a shock to the good preacher.” Drunks are bad enough, but not by twos and threes.) But wanting to be helpful, he gave Bill the name of a man who was known to be a chronic alcoholic. And when they met with each other, they both commiserated about how bad their lives had become when it centered around their addictive behavior. Then with insights gained from the Oxford movement, they developed the twelve steps that helped each other on their journey toward sobriety. In looking back at their experience, they were the most unlikely pair to start a movement that would eventually bless millions of people in 60 different countries.

You and I are called to be a people who, in the midst of our brokenness, misgivings, and doubts, still dare to believe in the “...*communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, and that God’s grace is great enough to redeem and restore broken lives.*”

We may all wonder, “Do we have what it takes to persevere and live faithfully in this thing called the Christian life?” But when I look at the lives of the saints and consider their struggles and self-doubts, I am persuaded that they were not in a class beyond our league—they were people just like you and me. And despite their many failings, they could still accomplish great things. In referring to their exploits, the author of the Book of Hebrews explains it was “...*by faith they pleased God,*” and it was “...*by faith they conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised.*”<sup>4</sup> And if this is true of them, then you and I can at least do our part in denying ourselves as we persevere in resisting evil and endeavor to trust and obey God.

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<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 11:6, 33

And if you feel discouraged, consider the ups and downs of the Apostle Peter. There was no one so seemingly unfit to follow Christ. His first words when called to follow Christ were, “***Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord.***”<sup>5</sup> Yet by God’s grace he was able to experience transformation as he followed the Savior. Yes, it is true; he failed repeatedly and even denied our Lord three times. And when he despaired of being counted worthy to serve his Master again, Jesus compassionately took him aside and asked him three times, “***Do you love me?***” That was all that was fundamentally required to be recommissioned for the Lord’s service.

In a similar manner, the Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the Ephesians, in our New Testament lesson today, that encourages new believers. In the first chapter, he tells them what it means to live a life “in Christ,” which Paul explains as being:

- Blessed (v.3)
- Chosen (v.4)
- Adopted (v.5)
- Redemption through his blood (v.7a)
- Forgiveness for our trespasses (v. 7b)
- United to Christ’s overall plan (v. 10)
- In him, we have received an inheritance (v. 11)
- Given the seal of the Holy Spirit, which guarantees our eternal inheritance (v.13-14)

These great and precious promises we given so that “***we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.***”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> St. Luke 5:8

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 1:13

To understand and comprehend these things, we need to pray for a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we might know the hope to which The Father of glory has called us.

Then in Paul's final request, he prays that we might come to realize *"what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the workings of his mighty power, which was demonstrated when Christ was raised from the dead."*<sup>7</sup> All of this is to say that there are endless eye-opening things in store for those who thirst for a deeper knowledge of Jesus Christ.

**So what makes a saint?** I love the answer a little boy once gave to that question as he looked up at a stain-glass window in his Church and said, "A saint is someone who lets the light shine through." Just as the saints in Church's stained-glass windows are made up of broken pieces of glass, we can let the light of Christ shine through our brokenness and weakness. And it comes through most beautifully as God's *"...chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe themselves with compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience."*<sup>8</sup>

In a recent survey, it was revealed that:

A majority of unchurched Americans (79 percent) think that Christianity today is more about organized religion than about loving God and loving people; 86 percent believe they can have a good relationship with God without being involved in church.

"These outsiders are making a clear comment that churches are not getting through on the two greatest commandments," to love God and love your neighbor.

What they see is only the outward exterior of the church. To them it is only about "candles, pews and flowers, rather than people living out their love for God by loving others," "Such skepticism can only be

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<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 1:19-20

<sup>8</sup> Colossians 3:12

overcome by churches and believers who demonstrate the unity and love for which Jesus prayed.”<sup>9</sup>

So today, I invite you to live the exciting adventure of the Christian faith. If you long for this kind of love but know that you are unworthy of it, you are in good company – the company of those that Jesus calls blessed. The company that will one day join the Apostle John in worship and praise around the heavenly throne because they accepted the gift of God’s love and forgiveness found in the person and work of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Prayer** Lord, we are encouraged by the example of all the Saints who have run the race before us; grant us the grace to persevere in running our race until at length, through your mercy, we may attain with all the saints your eternal joy, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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<sup>9</sup> Audrey Barrick, Christ Post Reporter, “How Do Unchurched Americans View Christianity?”