Feast of All Saints
November 1, 2026
Revelation 7:9-17, Psalm 34, 1-10, 22
1John 3:1-3, Matthew 5:1-12

Living Saints Throughout the Ages

Good morning, and happy feast of All Saints! When we sing the wonderful hymn "For all the Saints", I can close my eyes and see an unending procession passing by, people down through the ages, and in our day, moving together, a constant stream of people walking through the luminous darkness toward the source of the light, and radiating that light themselves. Women and men, rich and poor, the learned and those with simple, humble faith, of every nation culture and ethnicity. Some are gifted scholars, others are great leaders, others artisans and those who till the earth. Some are wealthy and powerful, others from more humble backgrounds. And yet all are united because they put their faith in Christ, and now his light shines in them forever!

What comes to mind when you think of a saint? It may be some very pious person enshrined in a stained-glass window who achieved the zenith of holiness. Perhaps it is someone we think of as rather otherworldly, with a very different life experience from our own. Maybe

we visualize saints as people who lived quite long ago and were formally canonized by the Roman Catholic Church. We may feel that we don't see people like that around us very much anymore. It is true that we learned of less modern saints such as St. Benedict and St. Thomas Aquinas, and visionaries such as St. Catherine of Siena and St. Bernadette of Lourdes. But there is another definition of a saint, and it is not based on a sublime degree of holiness or moral perfection. The biblical definition of a saint comes from the Greek word *hagios*, which means holy, or set apart. A saint, then, is a person who puts his or her faith in Jesus Christ and seeks to follow him as Lord, living out the values of the reign of God in love and service. A saint is not perfect, but always becoming, growing in a type of holiness that is not perfection but fulness and wholeness of life.

St. Paul makes reference to this more inclusive view of saints in the opening and closing of his letters to the various churches. Saints can be well-renowned and also the unknown faithful souls who loved their Lord and lived out their faith in lives of quiet beauty, humility, and grace. As the hymn "I Sing a Song of the Saints of God says it: "They

lived not only in ages past, there are hundreds of thousands still. The world is bright with the joyous saints who love to do Jesus' will. You can meet them in school or in lanes or at sea, in church or in trains or in shops or at tea for the saints of God are just folk like me, and I mean to be one too." I mean to be one too! And you know, look around this sanctuary; they are all around, you, and you, and you. You are one of the saints of God. That is the good news of the Gospel!

Let's take a look at what our scriptures for today have to say about being saints. In the reading from the book of Revelation, we have that wonderful passage where all those who have loved and trusted Jesus are gathered from the ends of the earth, robed in white that has been purified by the blood of the Lamb, praising God before the throne in many voices that become one voice. These are the saints who have clothed themselves in the love of God and the ones who have shared this love and compassion with others and lived at peace with themselves and all of creation. They have made missteps, mistakes, wandered from the way, but always found the path back home, a home where one day there will be no more suffering, tears will be wiped away, and they will know

joy once more. This is the vision of eternal life in Christ that never ends, and being a saint means we catch the vision of this life, and shine with the light of Christ in this world and the next.

In the lesson from Matthew, we hear the familiar opening words of the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes. As followers of Jesus, members of the household of saints, we are called to live out in our lives what is declared here. We are to live out the spirit of the law and commandments, and not just the letter, as Jesus teaches us. We are to be meek. This doesn't mean being self-effacing, but humble, grounded in God, using gentleness and restraint in our exercise of power. We are to hunger and thirst after God's righteousness as if it is the very air that we breathe. The mercy of God is to be our guide, for as we grant mercy, we are able to receive mercy. We are to be pure in heart, whole, with integrity and authenticity. We are to be active peacemakers, not being satisfied with the absence of conflict but actively working to build relationships of peace and trust, even with our enemies. Living as saints means that we learn to see the world with Jesus' eyes, through the perspective of God's grace. It means that we let go of our culture's

creed of getting what we want for ourselves without being mindful of the needs of our neighbors. It means we treat other human beings as sacred and precious, sharing a bond with us as fellow children of God.

So, if we are called to be contemporary saints, what is a saint really like?

First, saints are fully human folks. We are not perfect. We do stumble, and slip into sin, and we sometimes turn away from God. And yet, being faithful doesn't mean we never wander or sin. It means that we don't harden our hearts to the call of God to return, that at some level we know we belong to God and we will turn and take those first steps back home. It means it is okay to ask questions, because genuine questions from a seeking heart lead us deep into the loving mystery that is at the heart of God, of the Trinity, of Jesus, the Word made flesh. It is ok to have limitations, to not know, to be finite. St. Irenaeus of Lyon, a 2nd century Christian bishop and theologian wrote "The glory of God is a human being fully alive. So indeed, a saint is a human being who is fully alive!

Second, saints are pilgrim people. They are forever on the journey, not clinging to a sense of having arrived, a sense of permanence, but always ready to move, to follow new paths that lead us deeper into the mystery of growing in love and trust, knowing God will give us the light we need to see as we continue on the journey. God is our hope, our light, and we are to place God over any allegiance to place, culture, tribe, or nation.

Finally, saints are icons through which people can see the love of God in Christ, and the salvation, wholeness and reconciliation that is offered. Did you know that your life, with all of its messiness imperfections, gifts, courage, strength and deep beauty is a window through which people can see the face of Jesus? Did you know that your friendship, your kindness, your showing people that they matter makes the love of God incarnate once again? How you continue to question, to wrestle with doubt and then continue to believe and trust and hold the dark times and the times of light together in your heart, following Jesus as a disciple, is a quiet, yet powerful inspiration to all you meet.

And now, we gather here today to honor not only those of ages past but those contemporary saints living and dead, who have followed in the way of Jesus. And especially, we honor our very own saints, the beloved departed that are part of this gathered body of Christ, right here. We loved and laughed and wept and prayed and served together, and though we see them no longer in this life, we are forever connected because love never ends! We miss them terribly, and it is good to carry sacred space for that grief. And we also know, in the Communion of Saints, which is the larger life beyond the limits of time and space, that we are forever connected to them in love, faith, and that knowledge that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Thanks be to God!