

*What are these which are arrayed in white robes? And whence came they?*

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One of the final and most beautiful images in C.S. Lewis's book, *The Great Divorce*, reminds us of the Saints in Heaven, that there are some known, and that there are plenty more unknown. In the scene, the narrator spots a stately procession making its way toward him. A woman is being carried, in the manner of a queen, with great reverence by angels who shine like precious gems and all around her people are offering tokens of respect and admiration. So impressed is he that the narrator turns to his guide and wonders whether this might be the Blessed Virgin Mary. *No, says his guide, it's someone ye'll never have heard of. Her name on earth was Sarah Smith and she lived at Golders Green [a small suburb of London].* When the narrator asks, *she seems to be...well a person of particular importance?* To which he is told, *she is one of the great ones. Ye have heard that fame in this country and fame on Earth are two quite different things.* This one so highly honored in Heaven was a very ordinary person during her earthly life. But through her love, she became a spiritual mother to hundreds, indeed to every person she met. Even the lowly animals were embraced by her affection and came more to life. His guide explains, *every beast and bird that came near her had its place in her love. In her they became themselves. And now the abundance of life she has in Christ from the Father flows over into them.*

Sarah Smith, the great saint encountered in C.S. Lewis' *Great Divorce*, was an ordinary woman, who lived an ordinary life, who died an ordinary death in a nursing home. Sarah's husband had been a difficult and manipulative man and she must have borne this all with heroic and patient grace and love. We are taught by Sarah Smith that what is honored in heaven is by no means the same as what is honored by the world. Our Lord teaches at His sermon on the mount those Beatitudes which are to be the mark of every Christian and saint, *blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, blessed are the poor, blessed are the pure in heart.* The Beatitudes of the Kingdom of Heaven stand in opposition to the beatitudes of the world, *blessed are the opposite, blessed are those who have bought in totally and completely into the popular ideas and philosophies of popular culture.* The world judges the Sarah Smiths and the great saints of heaven as religious zealots and puritans, as joyless, humorless, super-Christians. The Beatitudes are not fun. To the world, they are not marks of a successful and comfortable life. We see this in the book of Wisdom, we are given the world's perspective alongside God's perspective, *in the sight of the unwise they seemed to die; and their departure is taken for misery. And their going from us to*

*be utter destruction; but they are in peace. For though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality.*

It has been said, *blessed are the pure in heart for they are the ones who want to see God anyways.* The Saints of God, are those men and women who devoted their entire selves to God, often standing against the world and even the established Church in their dedication and service to God. They embraced His love and joy, who lived out the beatitudes in the simplest and most profound ways. *Having been a little chastised, they shall be greatly rewarded: for God proved them and found them worthy for Himself.* This is why we celebrate All Saints' Day. This day, which has been celebrated since at least the year 373 AD, a Day of Holy Obligation, on a level with Christmas and Easter, reminds us of our calling as Christians. We are called to be saints of God. We are called to follow Christ completely, to be disciples and evangelists, to be servants and even martyrs if it is required of us. This day reminds us that when Jesus uses the word "blessed" it does not mean happiness or prosperity, but heavenly and spiritual exaltation. We are reminded that we should store our treasures in heaven as the great saints of old have done, instead of here below on earth.

God is calling us to be His saints! And before we think, well God has must really low standards for His saints, remember, we are expected to be among that number of the great multitude in heaven from the Book of Revelation. We are expected in heaven, clothed with the white robes of our baptismal gowns, with palms in our hands, continually praising and glorifying God. We are each called to be among the number of the blessed in the Gospel this morning; we are called to be the poor in spirit -the mourners, the meek; we are expected to hunger and thirst for righteousness, to be merciful, to be pure in heart, to be peace makers. For if we are all these things then we have begun to understand the Kingdom of Heaven. And if we find ourselves in the Beatitudes then we will be reviled by the world. Jesus tells us we should not fear persecution if persecution finds us, we will be in good company in fact, because so did the world persecute the saints and prophets. To live the Beatitudes, to live a life pleasing to God does not require super-human or super-Christian acts of holiness. It requires an ordinary holiness, simple devotion to God in all things, and the courage to love God and our fellow man.

If God wants and expects us to be His saints, then what do we need to do? We must keep God's commandments, we must practice the Beatitudes, we must confess our sins, avail ourselves of the frequent gift of Holy Communion. And finally, as our Old Testament lesson reminds us, *they that put their trust in Him shall understand the truth: and such as abide with him: for grace and mercy is to His*

*saints, and He hath care for His elect.* Sarah Smith is a fictional character, but there is great truth to her story. The ordinary person, with ordinary means of living, who lives and ordinary life and dies an ordinary death, but who places their trust, their love, and their life in Jesus Christ, can become the greatest of saints in the Kingdom of Heaven. We should not think of the great saints of heaven as those Christians who earned extra-credit or who achieved more grace than others, let us realize that the great saints of heaven are in heaven precisely because they are great saints. All the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Heaven are there precisely because they are all great saints. The Imitation of Christ gives us further hope, *Many who do not know whether they will be worthy to be numbered among the least who will come to heaven argue about who is highest in heaven. It is a great thing to be least in heaven, where all are great, for all who come there will be called the sons of God, and so they indeed will be.*

All Saints' Day reminds us that we should celebrate all the Saints in heaven, not just St. Peter, or St. Mary, or those saints in our stained glass windows, but all the saints known and unknown. Lewis's image in the Great Divorce should not be taken as completely fiction, for there are plenty of great saints in heaven that are unknown to the Church of God on earth. Let us pray; that perhaps our ancestors, or descendants, our neighbors, our fellow parishioners, are among those saints, or will be among those saints of God who are before His throne and described in the book of Revelation. May we be inspired to one day join the saints of God around His throne in heaven, and may we pattern our lives after their shining example. Amen.