

THE SAINTS

As I look at the month of August in my liturgical calendar, I see quite a few of my favourite saints! And I surprise myself that I not only recognize them, but that I can call them favourites! A few years ago I was too busy learning about my faith and the Church to spend any time thinking about saints. How shallow was my thinking....

There must be a vision in our world and a goal in our life. As Catholics, we aspire to be holy. “Holiness is simply the application of the values, principles, and spirit of the Gospel to the circumstances of our everyday lives, one moment at a time.”¹ That is our goal.

Reflect on some goals we have had in our lives. Do we meet those goals on our own? Perhaps it was to lower a golf score, or achieve a grade in piano, or get that job, or marry the guy of your dreams! Did you do it alone? No – there are always people helping – with our swing, with our lessons, giving references, introductions. Goals are never achieved – in my experience – on our own. This is also true about the goal for holiness. We need help from someone on the same path with the same goal, someone who has achieved holiness. I suspect you already see where I am going with this!

Our Church is a living communion of the Church Militant, Church Suffering and Church Triumphant. All three are in different stages of holiness. Those people who surround you in your everyday world are Church Militant – like you and me. We are living in this world but strive to focus on God and God’s kingdom in heaven. Those souls who have left this world and are now in a state of Church Suffering are in purgatory. They haven’t yet reached the state of purification for entering the gates of heaven. And finally – and this is the best by far! – there are the Church Triumphant. Those who have entered the gates of heaven. Those who have achieved holiness. Now – they are the ones we want to know.

In our faith, we strive always to imitate Jesus – but how, especially when many around us are not doing the same. That is why we look to the saints - the Church Triumphant. They also lived in this world. They also strived to imitate Christ. And they made it – and each one was different. Each had their own journey, their own thoughts and their own strengths. And they are part of our Church, our family. And family looks after family.

So, the saints become our coaches, our mentors. They inspire us because they have faithfully followed Christ in spite of their hardships and hurdles. By studying and understanding their life, they show us a safe path with which to follow. They share in our humanity. They are not supernatural beings like angels. They are human with all our weaknesses and pressures. And God helps us to see their lives and their works in a way that allows Him to speak to us. And gives us an opportunity to listen – most important! “When we look at the lives of those who have faithfully followed Christ, we are inspired.”²

The Church defines the saints as “those who are in glory, contemplating, ‘in full light, God himself triune and one, exactly as he is.’”³ But I like Fr Robert Barron’s description from his book ‘Catholicism’. Recall Luke 5 when Jesus boards the disciples’ boat uninvited and starts to order them around. They act on His orders and bring in their biggest haul of fish. This represents an invasion of God’s grace in our lives – and our cooperation with God’s grace. Fr Barron says further “The saints are those who have allowed Jesus to get into their boats and who have thereby become not superhuman or angelic but fully human, as alive as God intended them to be.”⁴ They are human – and they cooperated with God’s grace. We can do that!

So, get to know the saints. Read about them – on the internet, in books, in Scripture. Many books have been published about their lives. I even look in the news every day for those who I believe should be saints. And remember, everyone is different – just as every saint is different. Why you look to a particular saint may be very different from what I look to in that saint. When I need order to my chaotic world, I ask St Benedict to intercede for me. When I need compassion and love, I look to St Francis or St Therese of Lisieux. When I need courage and strength, I include St Joan of Arc in my prayers. And St Michael the Archangel defends me when I am in battle and he protects me always. But others may ask for the intercession of these holy saints for other reasons. It is personal and it is inspiring and it is a grace given to us by God.

There are saints who can teach us – St Maximilian Kolbe about the Blessed Virgin Mary, St Augustine about conversion and love, St Thomas Aquinas about structure and faith and reason. And St Bernard of Clairvaux rallies us to praise and glorify the saints:

“Come, brothers, let us at length spur ourselves on. We must rise again with Christ, we must seek the world which is above and set our mind on the things of heaven. Let us long for those who are longing for us, hasten to those who are waiting for us, and ask those who look for our coming to intercede for us. We should not only want to be with the saints, we should also hope to possess their happiness. While we desire to be in their company, we must also earnestly seek to share in their glory.”⁵

This reflection closes with a prayer from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer for All Saints’ Day November 1:

Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord: Give us grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

Written by: Elizabeth Pietrantonio

¹ Matthew Kelly, *Rediscover Catholicism: A Spiritual Guide to Living with Passion and Purpose*, 2nd ed. (S.l.: Beacon Pub., 2010), 60.

² [Vatican II. "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church - Lumen Gentium." *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church - Lumen Gentium*. N.p., 50 Nov. 1964. Web. 31 July 2014.](#)

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday Dell Publishing, 1995), 954.

⁴ Robert Barron, *Catholicism: a Journey to the Heart of the Faith*, Reprint ed. (New York: Image, 2014), 196.

⁵ Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Crossroads Initiative* website: 1, accessed August 4, 2014, [The Importance of the Saints and Devotion to Them](#).