

John 11:32-44

Did you know that the majority of Americans, whether they describe themselves as religious or not, believe in a spiritual realm beyond this world? (<https://pewrsr.ch/3uQpqs8>). With today being All Saints Day we think about those who have gone before us as saints. But really, who are the saints?

If you are wearing blue, stand up and stay standing, or if you can't stand raise your hand, put it down when it's tired. If you are wearing white, stand (and remain standing) if you are wearing red, do the same. Black, same. Green, same. Brown, same. Gray, same. Orange, same. Yellow, pink. Purple, stand up. If I have missed any color, stand, and those who had to put their hands down, put them up again. Look around you to see who is standing or has their hand up. Everyone should be standing or have their hand up. You see, we are all saints! You can put your hand down or sit down now. Believe me, I'm not saying we're all perfect because saints are not perfect. Martin Luther said, "We are all saints, and cursed is he who does not want to call himself a saint. However, you do not owe this to yourself but to the will of God, who would be your Father. To call yourself a saint is, therefore, no presumption but an act of gratitude and a confession of God's blessings" (*What Luther Says*, p. 1247).

Today's gospel tells the story of resurrection. The story of Lazarus being brought out of the tomb. There's a bit more to the story than what we heard today. If you're familiar with it you know that Jesus had plenty of time to arrive in Bethany, at Mary and Martha's home, before Lazarus died. The sisters knew that. The people surrounding them knew that. Jesus chose to stay away until Lazarus was dead in order to show that he possessed the power of God to raise Lazarus from the dead. That doesn't mean that the death of Lazarus didn't affect Jesus. Jesus felt the pain of loss, not only his own loss but the loss of those who were mourning. Jesus wept with them. But he didn't stop there, he told the people to roll away the stone. Of course there was a strong opposition to doing that.... Lazarus had been dead 4 days, there would be an odor. And according to Jewish beliefs, it was on the 4th day that the soul ascended to heaven. Jesus insisted, and the stone was rolled away. Jesus then called Lazarus out. Lazarus obeyed. Still wrapped in his graveclothes, Lazarus managed to get himself out of the tomb. Jesus then instructed the mourners to unwrap Lazarus, to loose him, to let him go on his way. Many who were present played a part in the resurrection of Lazarus.

Nowhere in the Bible are we told that Mary, Martha, or Lazarus were holy or moral. Being a saint has nothing to do with the life you live. That's a good thing or we would not be able to call ourselves saints.

The first two lessons today from Isaiah 25 and Revelation 21 sketched out visions of the end. Isaiah describes a time of feasting, a time when there will be no more death, a time when there will be no more sadness. It will be a time of the Lord's salvation. Revelation describes a new heaven and a new earth descending. It will be a time when God again resides among mortals. Death and mourning and crying and pain will be no more. Nowhere in these descriptions does it say what must be done to receive such a saintly existence. The good news is that sinners can be saints. According to Robert Lewis Stevenson, "The saints are sinners who keep on going."

What makes us saints? God. God bestows holiness on us. We are saints before God even though we are still sinners. We are at the same time saints and sinners. Anyone who believes in Jesus is a saint. Raise your hand if you believe that Jesus died for your

sins. Everyone, whether you raised your hand or not, is a saint. But we aren't the only saints. Anyone who believes in Jesus, or who believed in Jesus during their lifetime, is a saint. Today is a day to remember all of them. Every person who ever believed, or who will believe that Jesus is the Son of God who came to earth to take away our sin, is a saint. Today is the day we remember all throughout history who believe in Jesus. And we give thanks for all who have led the way for us to know Jesus. Today is a day where we stop, and we give thanks for our dear friends and loved ones who have died in the faith. Rejoice in God's Saints is hymn #418 in the ELW hymnbook. The first and last verses of the hymn read: "Rejoice in God's saints today and all days! A world without saints forgets how to praise. Their faith in acquiring the habit of prayer, their depth of adoring, Lord help us to share.

Rejoice in God's saints today and all days! A world without saints forgets how to praise. In loving, in living, they prove it is true; their way of self-giving, Lord, leads us to you."

The gospel reading we heard today from John gives us a sense of community with the faithful. Jesus with the living Mary and Martha and the dead Lazarus. The creed we recite about our faith says we believe in the communion of saints, that is those who are both living and dead are who make up the Church (with a big C). To speak of the Church in this way is to say that forever and ever this holy bunch of Christians will be together, in all times and places, united in praise. As we praise God now, our deceased beloved ones, and our unborn great-great-grandchildren will one day join together in praise.

We have a resurrection faith. We have a faith that allows us to know that one day we will all be united in the presence of God. It's the time in between now and then that is the most difficult time for those of us who are mourning our loved ones. But we can stand firm in the knowledge that Jesus felt that pain as well, he knows what we are going through, and he will ensure the time will come that we will be together. Jesus died so that we can live. Jesus' resurrection overcame death.

Yet, in another way we are surrounded by the cloud of witnesses who went before us. We have their teachings. We have the love that we continue to share. When we affirm our sainthood we are not alone, we are not separated from our loved ones who in their sainthood are not far away. Death has not separated each of us from them. God makes sure the holy bunch sticks together! The next time we feel worthless or question the direction of our lives, remember the company that you have and that in God's eyes we are all saints!

I'd like to end with another hymn, this one from the new hymnal supplement All Creation Sings #979 "Making Their Way"

Making their way down through the ages, sinners and saints have heard God's call; wealthy and poor, powerful, lowly, Jesus' disciples, one and all. Gathered for worship, offering thanks, the greatest with the least have come to share this feast.

Making their way all the world over, Christian assembly on this day, hearing the Word, sharing the Banquet, learning to walk in Jesus' way. Members of Christ, united in love, they seek our God to know, and so together grow.

Making our way season by season, pilgrims, we journey till life's end; travelling light, sharing the riches, caring for stranger as for friend, till in the joy of longing fulfilled, together we will come, to our eternal home.

All glory be to God!