

Eternal, Praise-Worthy Legacy

Today we celebrate All Saints Day. Why do we do such a thing? Isn't it a bit "Roman Catholic" to be worshiping saints? *Actually, yes it is... but we're not worshiping saints, dead or alive.* We worship God and God alone—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Like the angel said to St. John when he fell down to worship him at the end of Revelation: *"You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."* That's exactly what we do. *Okay... so why All Saints Day then?* Historically, Christians have observed/celebrated All Saints Day as a formal "feast day" since the early 600s. The whole reason, from its inception, was to give thanks to God for the all faithful who've come before us; *i.e., those who lived, taught, and modeled proper and God-pleasing faith in their daily lives.* As our Synod so plainly states, citing directly from our Lutheran Confessions: *First, we thank God for giving faithful servants to His Church. Second, through such remembrance our faith is strengthened as we see the mercy that God extended to His saints of old (who were just as sinful as any of us – my addition). Third, these saints are examples both of faith and of holy living to imitate according to our calling in life.* In a nutshell, we're taking a little special time to worship God and give thanks to God for saintly, faithful people and the roles they played in our lives and in the life of the holy Christian Church on earth.

Do we honor and give thanks to God for *heroic pillars of the faith* like St. Paul and St. Peter? Absolutely. We do the same for like Abraham, Moses, King David, Ruth, Esther, and any of the other Old Testament saints. We also thank God for the *many martyrs throughout history* who shed their blood and died on account of the faith. Those of you with Germanic DNA, we give thanks for faithful men like St. Boniface, who brought the Christian faith to the oak-worshipping pagans living in Germania way back in the 700s. He would later suffer martyrdom for his faithful mission work. Those of you of English descent, we thank God for brave and faithful men like St. Augustine, who brought the faith to the pagan Anglo-Saxons in the 500s. Irish descent? We thank God for faithful St. Patrick (and St. Palladius, who was the *first* missionary to Ireland, and the guy St. Patrick succeeded upon his martyr death) for his work to the pagan Celts in the 400s. Joan of Arc (France), St. Wenceslas (Czech), St. Canute (Denmark), St. Martin Luther, St. Lucia (martyred witness of the faith to Sicily in the 300s), and so many more... *we give thanks to God for all of them.* It's on a day like All Saints Day that we're reminded how we're standing on the shoulders of saintly giants of the faith.

What about those more anonymous and "not-so-heroic" saints God placed in our lives; i.e., those who lived, taught, and modeled proper and God-pleasing faith in their average everyday lives; e.g., grandparents, parents, teachers, pastors, etc.?

We thank and praise God for their *faithfulness*” too!

examples of “*saintly repentant*”

Now... the “repentant” part is key here! *Were these saints perfect in their earthly lives? **By no means!*** (Neither were Sts. Paul, Peter, or anyone not named “Jesus Christ, Son of God.”) This is another reason we render special thanks and praise to God on All Saints Day—He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. They weren’t perfect and without sin, *but it’s here in their sinful imperfections that they led by faithful example.* It doesn’t matter if we’re talking about St. Paul, St. Thomas, or your sainted dad or grandma, in the humility of faith they all acknowledged their sinfulness. They all confessed their sins. They didn’t deny it. They didn’t make *excuses* for their sins. They confessed, holding fast to the redemption found only in the blood of Jesus.

And as far as those “closer to home,” more anonymous and “not-so-heroic” saints God placed in our lives, I’m going to go out on a limb and say they didn’t do anything miraculous either, did they? *They didn’t do anything monumental or history-making, not by worldly standards at least.* Nope... they just quietly lived out their life of faithful repentance in relative anonymity. No one outside their little circle of life knew their name. They lived. They died. Maybe there’s a gravesite that occasionally gets visited by a loved one. Maybe there are still some family pics or old movies. But within just a couple of generations, even those become relics of somebody we were somehow related to. *We don’t even know their name or really anything about them other than the fact that we’re somehow related to them.* It’s because of them, though, and their faithfulness that we share the faith of all the company of saints, both in heaven and on earth. Far more important than eye color or hair texture or mannerisms or anything else that they may have passed down to us *is the one and true saving faith that they passed down to us.* They may not have had a lot to give or leave behind in terms of worldly wealth or goods, but they gave an eternity’s worth of riches in the passing down of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those entrusted to their care; i.e., our forefathers, who would then pass that same faith down to us. No, history may not know their name. No one outside their immediate little circle knew their name. Even family members just a couple generations removed don’t know their name... *but God knows them by name. He calls them by name. They are His beloved children... presently and forever.*

This is our celebration today. *God knows all His saints—all His beloved children—by name.* We give thanks to Him for all the saints who’ve played a role in the formation of our faith. We thank and praise Him for “*giving such faithful servants to His Church.*” We thank and praise Him because it is “*through such remembrance that our faith is strengthened as we see the mercy that God extended to His saints of old (who were just as sinful as any of us – my addition).*” We thank and praise Him because “*these saints are examples both of faith and of holy living to imitate according to our calling in life.*”

Now, one final thing before we call it a day—***do you notice how two of those three reasons to thank and praise God don't necessarily refer to saints who've fallen asleep in the faith and who now worship in the Church Triumphant?*** Does God provide faithful servants to His Church in the present? Does God provide saints in the here and now to serve as good examples of faith and holy living that we should try to imitate and emulate in our daily lives?

This is why I love the fact that the Gospel lesson appointed for All Saints Sunday is the Beatitudes. If you pay attention to what your Lord is saying here, all that divine blessing is being ***bestowed upon people in the present***; e.g., those who are mourning; those who are hungering and thirsting for His righteousness, which He bestows freely and in overflowing abundance in His Word and Sacraments. ***Saints want all the Jesus they can get!*** He bestows His divine blessing upon those who are striving to bring His peace to their little corner of this fallen and sinful world; those who are being merciful to others just as their Father in heaven is merciful to them; those who are pure in heart; ***that is, walking the walk of faith, and not just putting on a show***; those who remain steadfast in the faith, walking and living as “saints in Christ” even as they suffer for no other reason than simply being faithful to Him.

Remember: The Greek word *hagios*, which we translate as “saint,” simply means “holy one/person.” A saint is someone whom God has declared holy and righteous, which He does, purely by grace, to all those who hold fast to Him in simple baptismal faith. **That's us!** Saints aren't just those who've died in the faith and gone home to heaven. ***Saints reside on this side of eternity too!*** The saints still presently residing on this side of eternity are called blessed by God because they are ***holding fast in repentant faith*** to the mercy and grace He so freely bestows upon all those who trust in Christ alone for their redemption.

Now, as I said earlier, the repentant part is the key here. ***Are we saints perfect in our earthly lives? By no means!*** No one is batting a perfect “1000” when it comes to the commandments or the Beatitudes. The sinful fruit doesn't fall from the sinful tree, and that sinfulness goes all the way back to our first fathers, St. Noah and St. Adam. But this is another reason why we render special thanks and praise to God on All Saints Day: Because He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, ***and we're the living, breathing proof of this!***

We're not perfect and without sin, but it's here in our sinful imperfections that we have the ***opportunity to lead by faithful example***. We have the opportunity to acknowledge our sinfulness and confess our sins. As saints in Christ—the same Christ who died for all those sins—we have the opportunity to ***set the saintly example*** by not denying our sinfulness or trying to make ***excuses*** for our sins. We have the blessed opportunity to ***lead by example***, confessing and holding fast to the redemption found only in the blood of Jesus.

As saints in Christ, you are called “blessed” by Almighty God Himself—***right here and right now—purely by His mercy and grace, solely because of Jesus.*** My prayer is that we live out this state of saintly blessedness every day and every opportunity our good Lord provides us. I pray that we are living, breathing examples of what it means to be repentant saints in Christ, every day and every opportunity our good Lord provides us.

I’m going to leave it there for the day. Just like last week, I’m reminded of the fourth verse from “A Mighty Fortress.” *“Were they to take our house, goods, honor, children, or spouse, though life itself be wrenched away, they cannot win the day. The Kingdom’s our forever.”* **May our legacy be Christ and His Kingdom.** May those who come after us (and those still with us in our little orbit of life), may they render faithful thanks and praise to God because of us. May the faith of our fathers—our faith—be their faith until that blessed day when all the saints, from every tribe, nation, and tongue, are finally gathered around the throne in heaven, clad in the white robes of Christ’s perfect righteousness with palm branches in hand, rejoicing in one united voice, *“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”* Until that blessed day, however, go forth and live the life of a repentant saint, confident in the joy and peace that our Lord, ***in His mercy and grace, which knows no bounds or limits (as evidenced by the cross of Jesus)***, has already joined us together through Holy Baptism “with angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven.” May this blessed, saintly reality give you joy and peace, no matter the time, the place, or the circumstance, now and into all eternity.

AMEN