

**All Saints, November 1, 2020, St. Anne's  
Revelation 7:9-17; Psalm 34:1-10, 22; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12**

Today we're celebrating All Saints Day – a day the church has been commemorating from at least the beginning of the 3rd century, and probably even earlier than that. All Saints Day started as a commemoration for the early church martyrs who didn't have a memorial day of their own because the church didn't know the exact date of their death. As the centuries went by, and the church became more formally organized, certain Christians began to be officially recognised as what you might call, 'big S' saints.



These are the ones we usually think of when we think of 'Saints' – people like Francis or Peter, who were formally canonized because of something special

about their life or death.

But in more recent times we've begun to return to the original *biblical* usage



of 'saint' to mean all Christians. For example, Paul often writes to the 'saints' of whatever city he's writing to – meaning the community of Christians in that city. And in the Apostles'

Creed and a few other early church writings, the phrase "Communion of Saints" is used to mean all baptized Christians in all times and places. By



*this* definition, if you're a baptized Christian, **you** are a saint. And so, since in this definition every baptized person is a saint, All Saints Day is often now used to commemorate our own 'small s' saints who have died.

Those baptised persons we have known and loved who are no longer with us

in this world. But there is, of course, more to being a saint than just having some water sprinkled over you.

The Greek word we translate as ‘saint’ is ‘*hagios*’ - an adjective meaning "holy." To be "*holy*" basically means "to be set apart" – to be *dedicated* to a special purpose. Thus, Holy Communion is *holy* because we take *ordinary*



bread and *ordinary* wine and dedicate them to the *special* purpose of being vessels of the divine for us. The commandment, "Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it *holy*" means to make that day

special and distinct from the other 6 days in the week. One day a week set aside from the usual work of ordinary life so that we can not only rest but also refresh our relationship with *God*. And in the same way, a ‘saint’ whether big ‘s’ or small ‘s’, is someone set aside for a special purpose – namely, being a vessel for God’s love and purpose in the world. A saint is a person *made holy* through their relationship and connection to **God**. A saint



is someone who allows the light of God, that we all carry in our souls, to peep out into the world and illuminate the way for others.

Now, **we** often use the word saint to refer to *behaviour* - we talk about



people being ‘saintly’ when they’re morally or ethically good. But that’s *not* what being a saint means. Being ‘good’ is the *result*, not the *cause*, of being a saint.

Because connection with God- being in *relationship* with God- will, when you *allow* it to, slowly transform you so that your relationship with the divine shines through your actions.

We all *know* (usually through sad experience) that when we're *less* than our best self, we diminish our own lives and the lives of those around us. But when we live in intentional *connection* with God, when we allow ourselves to **be** 'holy' – that is, to be *connected* to God at a deep level - that connection with God *helps* us to *grow into* being our **best** self. That's the



*promise* we make in baptism. We promise to be in a committed relationship with God, to turn towards God and away from all that diminishes us so that we **will** grow into the full stature of who God meant us to be. And it's the *dedication* of our life to this connection to be a channel of the divine that makes us a saint. Of course, baptism is the promise and dedication – *living into* that promise is the work of a *lifetime*. Baptism makes us a saint – but it's *not* the **end** of the journey. In baptism we are making an ongoing and continuous commitment



to keep allowing ourselves to become transformed more and more into someone for whom right action is *natural* and happens without needing conscious *effort*.



It's this idea of living into relationship with God that the author of the letter of John is talking about in our second reading - although today's reading is taken out of context so it's hard to see the point the author is making. This is part of a section in the epistle about *living* our faith. The author uses the imagery of becoming what we *see* – becoming what we set our *attention* on. And he says, when we use *Christ*

as the image we consistently focus on, it changes us at our deepest level so

that doing good, kind, loving things becomes *natural* for us, and doing sinful things seems *unnatural*.

For example, when some people walk through a store they're *tempted* to steal, and they have to hold themselves back. Others don't have to hold themselves back from stealing; because doesn't *occur* to them to steal – it's not part of their nature. Stealing would be contrary to who they **are**. And this same principal is also true in a million ways in our actions – how we respond to people who hurt us, how we treat those who aren't important, how generous we are in praising and supporting others and so on.

The argument the author of the letter is making is that the *promise* of our faith is that we *will* become like Christ in the future, and our present challenge is to become like him **now**. To become people who *are* more and more loving, kind, generous etc. because we are focused on allowing the image of Christ to shape us.



We might say, being a 'saint' is about allowing yourself to be shaped into someone who makes goodness look easy. As Nathan Soderblom put it, "Saints are persons who make it easier for others to believe in God." Or as Laurence Housman said, "A saint is one who makes goodness attractive." *That's* the call of each of us as saints.



Through our baptism we're set aside and dedicated to a life shaped by our deep connection to God. We are made part of the great communion of saints stretching through time and space who have in their *own* lives tried to live into the image of Christ.

Through God we grow towards the full stature of the people we were created to be. My hope for all the saints of St. Anne's church is that each of you *live into your* calling to **be** holy people – allowing the light of God, the love of God to shine forth *through* you into the world.