

WHO ARE THE SAINTS?

Pope John Paul II's beatification mass for Mary MacKillop this raised a number of questions.

1. Are only some people saints?

Yes, but they are not as few as we are led to believe. When Paul wrote to the congregation at Corinth, a congregation that had many serious things wrong with it, he addressed his letter "*To the church of God in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints*" (1 Cor 1:2).

2. Are some people sinners and other people saints?

The Roman Catholic Church also acknowledges that Mary MacKillop was out of favour with the hierarchy of their church, and for a time under excommunication. So they must have regarded her as a sinner at that time, at least. For people who are Christians, it is never a matter of either / or. All Christians are both saints and sinners at the same time (See Rm 1:13-25).

3. Is there anything wrong with calling only some Christians, like St. Peter, and like Mary MacKillop, only people whose lives seemed particularly holy, or only those who have died, saints?

Words often convey a wrong impression. Since the New Testament calls all Christians "priests", it is misleading to call only clergymen "priests". Similarly, since The New Testament calls all believers "*saints*", it is misleading to call only some Christians "saints". 2 Peter 1:9 calls Christians both holy and priests.

4. Does an outstandingly good ("holy") life, or being credited with having performed a miracle, either during one's lifetime, or allegedly after being invoked in prayer after death, qualify a person to be a saint?

No. Just as Jesus Christ is our righteousness, He is also our "sanctification" (1 Cor 1:30). Since any sin deserves God's judgment, there is no point in saying that some sins are more serious than others, or that some sinners are holier than others. Nothing must be allowed to compete with what Christ has done for us. Without Him we can do nothing.

5. Don't we confess in the Creed, "I believe in the communion of saints"?

Yes, indeed. There is some debate whether the word "*communio sanctorum*" was originally intended to mean "the communion of the holy things (the sacraments), or "the communion of the saints (God's holy people), but it probably meant the latter. Nicetas of Remesiana gives the first evidence of this late addition to the Apostles Creed. It reminds us, positively, that those who have died in faith are with the Lord and alive to Him, and that "the saints below and those above but one communion make."

6. What about prayers to Mary and the saints?

Jesus Christ is the only High Priest, and the only mediator between God and men (1 Tm 2:5). The Scriptures nowhere give an instance of any person who had died answering prayer, nowhere command us to pray to any but God, and there is no promise that they will hear prayer.

[For further reading, see the *Augsburg Confession*, Article 21, The Cult of Saints", and check the index on "saints" in the *Book of Concord*].