

The Festival of All Saints

There are saints, and there are SAINTS! Christians have grown accustomed to calling certain believers “Saints” with a capital “S,” in recognition of the great and holy works God did in and through them for His church. We do well to keep this tradition, labelling the apostles, evangelists, and other great Christians of old as Saints.

We may also use this term for those who have entered the church triumphant after falling asleep in Christ Jesus. We speak of grandparents, a beloved former pastor, or other such people as having been “sainted.” This, too, is a good practice, for it recognises the holiness bestowed by God to them, as they now experience it in full, in heaven above.

Yet there is still one more manner in which we use the term “saint.” This one comes from the gospel appointed for All Saints’ Day in Matthew 5. There, it repeatedly speaks of God’s people as blessed in what appears to be some odd ways. All believers in Christ Jesus are blessed by the holiness of their Saviour through which they are rightly called “saints.”

How do we sinful people become holy in God’s sight, that we might be called His “saints”? Luther tells us in his explanation of the first petition of the Lord’s Prayer. *God’s Name is holy when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, also lead a holy life according to it. This, grant us, dear Father in heaven.*

Do I have to work hard to make myself holy enough to be called a saint? No. This is the Holy Spirit’s work as Luther reminds us in his explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed. There he teaches us that it is the Holy Spirit who calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies us. This means He makes us holy, just as He, the Lord, is holy.

You are holy-fied (if that is a word) not by what you do, but by what God does to bless you. You are blessed by God, who bestows to you His kingdom, who comforts you, who satisfies you with Christ’s own righteousness, credited to your account by faith. You are blessed to receive His mercy, to be called sons of God because of the Son of God, your brother, Jesus, who died for your salvation. You are blessed by God to one day see Him as He is in the kingdom of heaven!

So rejoice this All Saints’ Day to be numbered not with the transgressors, as Jesus was, but with the saints of the Kingdom of heaven, by the blessing of your God and Saviour, Christ Jesus.

Ten thousand times ten thousand,
In sparkling raiment bright,
The armies of the ransomed saints
Throng up the steeps of light.
'Tis finished, all is finished,
Their fight with death and sin;

Fling open wide the golden gates
And let the victors in.

(Hymn 496 v.1)