

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Intro

*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.*

So begins the hymn we sang to begin our service.

[So begins the hymn we will sing to begin the 9:30 service.]

I. Why do Saints Matter

A. This past Friday, I was meeting with my Iona students, and the question came up, “Why do Saints matter?”

1. They had lots of answers:

- They are examples of faith.
- They are models of the Christian life.

2. You might want to ask yourself that question, “Why do Saints matter?”

B. And it may well be that a similar question is being asked in our New Testament reading.

1. Here, in a heavenly vision, a great multitude of people “from every nation, tribe, and language gather before the throne of God.”

2. They carry palm branches as symbols of victory, and are robed in white, representing their status as forgiven sinners.

3. They join the angels in worship—affirming blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power, and might to God forever.

4. And the person next to the author asks him essentially the same question: “Who are these people?”

- Or perhaps, “Why do these folks matter?”

5. And he is told, “*These are they who have come through the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*”

6. This passage is full of God’s promises of shelter and compassion for all God’s people.

7. And that’s the key—the offer is to ALL God’s people;

- not just the special ones, not just the holy ones—ALL God’s people.

C. In the New Testament, the word “saints” is used to describe the entire membership of the Christian community.

1. From very early times though, the word “saint” came to be applied primarily to persons of heroic sanctity—whose lives served as an example to be followed by those still carrying on in the faith.

2. And here on All Saints Day—we celebrate those great HEROES of the faith, whose lives continue to be examples for us to follow.

3. And that’s what we have, in a way, in our Prayers of the People.

II. Prayers of the People

A. As you look at this morning’s Prayers of the People, it might be a “Who are all these people” moment with so many names there.

1. So, I thought we might take a look at the Prayers and walk through them and see just whom it is we are praying for and how they continue to serve as an example for us to follow.

2. So let's turn to the Prayers of the People and see who some of these folks are—you can follow along if you like.

3. Our Prayers begin with the Patriarchs and Matriarchs from the Book of Genesis and then moves to our “Mothers and Fathers in the Faith” as we celebrate **Elizabeth**—mother of John the Baptist, **Simeon** of the Temple, **Monica**, mother of Augustine of Hippo, and **Helen**, mother of Constantine—both of whom prayed for their sons to come to the faith.

4. John the Baptist we know, and the same with the Gospel writers, and Thomas the Doubter.

- **Augustine of Canterbury** brought the Roman Faith to Southern England—**Samuel Joseph Isaac Shereschewsky** brought the faith to China and Japan—and **Henry Martyn** brought the faith to India and Persia.

5. Next, we come to the Monastic heroes of **Bernard** Abbot of Clairvaux, and **Dominic**, the founder of the Order of Preachers known as the Dominicans; then there's **Catherine of Siena**, who also was a Dominican Nurse who worked tirelessly for the unity of the church; and the **Wesleys**, **John**, the preacher, and **Charles**, the hymn writer, who worked to bring the word of God to the common people of their time.

6. I'm not going to hit every name, or we'd be here all day; some like **Columba** we know, but some others you might be less familiar with: **Benedict of Nursia** is credited as the Father of modern monasticism and wrote the rule by which many monasteries still run today—**James Huntington** was the founder of the Order of the Holy Cross—the Monks in Santa Barbara—and **Dag Hammarskjöld** was the second Secretary General of the U.N. and a deeply spiritual man.

7. There are musicians and artists, all who bring God's beauty to life, including **Caedmon** who was an uneducated stable hand in Hilda's monastery of Whitby, who learned to compose in a dream and became the first great Anglo-Saxon Christian poet.

8. There are justice seekers such as **Amos of Tekoa**, otherwise known as the Prophet Amos, who used the image of a plumb line as an image of uprightness and justice;

- **John Wycliffe**, who translated the Bible into English and was martyred for his troubles—along with many others who were martyred for their faith.

9. And you might be wondering along with me why **Hildegarde of Bingen** is referred to as the “Sybil of the Rhine;”

- a sybil in Classic Greek times was an Oracle or Prophetess—and Hildegarde, who was a writer, composer, philosopher, mystic and visionary, all at a time when women were not educated, certainly fits that definition.

10. So, “Why do Saints matter?”

- As our hymn puts it:

Some march in events to turn them God’s way;

Some need to withdraw, the better to pray.

Some carry the Gospel through fire and through flood;

Our world is their parish; their purpose is God.

11. All of these and many, many more are just some of the SAINTS of God—those Heroes of the Faith who serve as examples for how we can live our lives as Christians today.

III. Celebrating Today

A. So who do WE celebrate?

1. On this All Saints Day—we do celebrate those great HEROES of the faith, but we also have the opportunity to celebrate the rest of us.

2. Yes, there are all those heroes, but many of the folks we talk about in the prayers would say they were nothing special—just a quiet person trying to live their life as best they can and sharing God’s love with others.

3. But it is that quiet person—that one going about their life, living it the best they can—they are the ones who serve as an example for us **here and now** as WE strive to live OUR lives as best we can.

4. So, “Why do Saints matter?”

5. Basically, after all is said and done, we can say this; being a Saint is **what it looks like to live out your faith in the world.**

- What it looks like to live out your faith in the world.

C. So, who is a Saint for you?

1. Who is it that sets a “saintly” example for you?

2. Who is a model that helps you to lead a better life and to put your faith in action?

3. As our hymn puts it:

*Rejoice in those Saints, unpraised and unknown,
who bear someone’s cross, or shoulder their own;
they share our complaining, our comforts, our cares;
what patience in caring, what courage is theirs!*

4. So, Who is a Saint for you?

- And Who might YOU be a Saint for?

5. For it’s not only how someone else lives out their faith in the world—but how WE live OUR faith in the world.

6. So, let this All Saints Day remind us that **WE** are called to be an **EXAMPLE** of how to live the Christian life—in other words, to be a Saint for somebody else.

Let us Pray – in the final verse of our hymn:

*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:
The way of self-giving, Lord leads us to you. AMEN. (689 WOV)*