

Saintly - A Meditation on All Saints Sunday  
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Matthew 5:1-12

I have a quiz for you about saints, sometimes thought of as “Catholic” saints for it is in the Catholic and Orthodox churches that saints are most talked about and often seen as one to pray to for help.

So, if I want to find something, like my keys, I pray to? (Saint Anthony)

If I want to sell my house which saint do I pray to and bury upside down in the yard? (St Joseph)

And I feel like I have a lost cause, or I am a lost cause, I pray to? (St Jude)

Personally, when I think of lost causes, I think of Saint Laurie. You haven't heard of that saint? Saint Laurie was a librarian at the library in the town where I went to middle school. Those were horrible years for me. I was bullied. I was depressed. I was not sure who I was or who I was becoming.

The library was safe, a haven, and books gave me the best place to “live” during that time.

Laurie showed me new series', new characters, and new authors like Madeleine L'Engle and Lloyd Alexander and Roald Dahl and more. I saw her as a beautiful person who loomed large in my mind. She practically glowed. She definitely sported a halo.

Many years later when visiting my mom there was a program at that same library and led by the very same Saint Laurie. I went to the program and to my huge surprise there was this shortish woman who led a so-so presentation and sometimes fumbled her words. I was shocked, dismayed even. What had happened to my saint?

Later as I reconciled my two experiences of this saint I reflected on what it meant. Her very humanness that I experienced as an adult in no way diminished her saintly saving of me as a somewhat broken pre-teen. Saints do have clay feet after all.

In many ways that is their greatest gift to us for it does not put sainthood beyond our reach. To be a saint requires that we act, that we follow in faith, that we risk for Jesus' sake. Everyone can be a saint. And that means everyone is called to be a saint.

“We celebrate the fact that God creates faith in God's people, and those people through ordinary acts of love, bring the Kingdom of Heaven closer to Earth. We celebrate that we have, in all who've gone before us, what St Paul calls such a great cloud of witnesses and that the faithful departed are as much the body of Christ as we are.” (Steve Pankey, draughtingtheology.com)

I know you have saints in your lives. People who have done extraordinary things, poured out love generously on you. Sometimes for just a moment; sometimes for a long time. Saints I believe help us to more fully find and embrace ourselves, the self that God sees and calls forth.

One pastor's posting on All Saints recalled her favorite saint.

"Saint Dymphna was the daughter of a pagan Irish king and his Christian wife in the 7th century. Sadly, she was murdered by her father. But before her death she is said to have founded a home for the ill and many crazy people reportedly became a lot less crazy around her.

That's right...St. Dymphna is officially the patron saint of the nervous, the patron saint of the emotionally disturbed, the patron saint of the mentally ill, and the patron saint of those with neurological disorders." (Nadia Boles Weber, patheos.org)

What we celebrate when we celebrate All Saints is not the superhuman faith and power of a select few but is God's ability to use flawed people to do divine things. What might it be like if Pilgrim reached out to those with mental health challenges and provided safe haven. Reached out to family members with no one to talk to about their daughter who was institutionalized or their son who had an overdose. Saint Dymphna's presence would be here lived out through us.

Today we recognize All Saints.

The saints of the early church.

The saints meaning those who have died and gone before us to the life that follows after this one.

The saints who are with us on this earth, striving, working for justice, listening to God, moving always moving toward bringing the kingdom of God to earth.

It is hard work to be a saint. But I know you can do it. I'm working on it too.

A final story for you:

There's a story of a good man who dies and goes to heaven, and who is welcomed at the pearly gates, which are thrown open for him to enter. He goes through them in a daze of bliss, because it is everything he has been taught, golden streets, milk and alabaster and honey and golden harps. He wanders the streets lost in happiness, until after a while he realizes that he is all alone; he hasn't seen anybody at all. He walks and walks, and he sees nobody.

So he goes back to the gates, and he asks, "Peter?"

"Yes, my son?"

"This really is heaven?"

"Oh, yes, my son. Don't you like it?"

"Oh, it's just wonderful! But where is everybody? Where are the prophets? Where is the Holy Family? Where are the saints?"

Peter looks at him kindly. "Oh, them? They're all down in hell, ministering to the damned. If you'd like to join them, I'll show you the way." (Madeleine L'Engle, *A Stone for a Pillow*)

Let's get to it.

Amen.