

Across the country today, and across the world, many churches are celebrating the feast of All Saints. We celebrate it today if we didn't celebrate it last Tuesday, November 1<sup>st</sup>, which is the real date of All Saints day.

All Saints is a pretty old holiday for the church; it first came about when there were so many outstanding heroes in the Christian faith

that they couldn't all be given a separate day to be remembered.

So while the biggies, like St. Peter, or St. Paul, or St. Stephen or a few others

still kept their own day, All Saints day became a day to remember

all the saints of the church, because by the year 400 or so,

there were way too many faith heroes to fit into a 365 day year.

When we think about saints, or sainthood,

especially if we think about what we may have learned in our younger years, most of us were either taught about Saints with a capital S,

or saints with a lower-case s.

When we think of saints with a capital S, we tend to be thinking about the famous ones—St. Francis, or St. Peter, or St. Mary. Those folks we put on a pedestal and venerate as shining examples of holiness of life.

People so virtuous that it would be hard to imagine

sitting down with them for a cup of coffee. Or glass of beer.

We might, especially if we grew up Anglican,

think of lower-case saints as people we might meet in shops or at tea.

Other times we might think about lower case saints not always so nicely.

Sometimes we also refer to long suffering souls who are do-gooders

with bad attitudes as saints.

They do good, but they have been soured by the doing.

We might want use that kind of a saint as reason never to become so serious about religion that we lose our sense of humor.

And we are tempted to put the first kind of saint, with a capital S on a pedestal so it seems an impossible goal for little old us.

We don't stop to think that even St. Paul had morning breath  
and St. Peter was so hot-headed and impulsive that he would have a hard  
time getting through an Eagles game without swearing.

We fail to consider that If St. Teresa of Avila lived today,  
she might use the last scoop of coffee grounds in the break room and not  
replace the canister.

If St. Bridget or St. Francis lived today, they might have embarrassing  
pictures on Facebook of their younger and wilder days.

If we put saints on pedestals,

we can imagine that they didn't know anything about the kinds of  
challenges regular people, like us, face.

What does Saint Anselm know about paying the mortgage on time?

What can St. John of the Cross's lofty poetry do for us when

we get a flat tire or go through a divorce or are diagnosed with cancer?

We tell ourselves that the saints didn't know about what real life  
is like. No wonder they did so well.

But when we do that, then we have forgotten the original use of the term saints,  
the kinds of saints we just might meet in shops or at tea.

When Paul used the word saint, he used it to talk about all the faithful,  
gathered to worship God. He was talking about people like us.

We forget that the term was first used first used  
to describe those who had dedicated their life to worship God  
by learning and following the teachings of Jesus.

He was talking about the person sitting in the pew next to you today.

Ordinary people.

Ordinary people made holy by a decision to love God  
by learning to love their neighbor, like Jesus taught.

Ordinary people made holy by taking up the challenge  
to really learn how to forgive. Ordinary people made holy by learning to be  
stand strong in the face of bullying.

Ordinary people whose lives shined brightly,  
and over the ages teach us how to let our lights shine too.

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One of the extraordinary things about Jesus was how he loved everyone;  
Peter who was hotheaded and impulsive, Thomas who had his doubts,  
the leper who stank, and the woman who had been around the block a few times.

The fact that they were flawed, imperfect people  
didn't stop Jesus from loving them.

Through Jesus, God's love shone forth

and even the poor were beloved, even the hungry, even the reviled.

Blessed are you, beloved are you,

because even though life so hard right now,

it isn't a sign that God has abandoned you.

It doesn't work that way, says Jesus.

God doesn't love you by making your life perfect,

God loves you by being with you when it isn't.

Jesus loves us by hanging with us on all the crosses of life,

joining our human suffering,

so that we know we haven't been forgotten by God.

A saint is simply one who believes it to be true  
that they are loved by God,  
and then goes on to become that same love, to others.

Today we remember the lives of those who have carried, for the world,  
or maybe just for us, the light of God's love, the light of Christ.

Today we celebrate those who were deeply dedicated to do their best  
to learn, and follow, the teachings of Jesus.

And because of that, in them, God's light shone bright.

Today we remember that we are surrounded, through memory,  
across time and space, by the light they once carried,  
and still carry in our hearts.

Today we thank God for the all the saints who have shown in their living,  
their loving and yes, sometimes even in their dying,  
that God's love transforms lives when it is lived,  
that God's love can even transform the world,  
when we to follow their example, and learn, and live  
the teachings of Jesus Christ, the great shepherd of our Christian flock.