

# *Sunday of All Saints*

## *Known & Unknown*

Glory to Jesus Christ! Let us begin In the name of the Father...

### **A. Historical Background**

The Sunday following Pentecost is dedicated to All Saints. This includes those who are known to us, and those who are known only to God. What is the meaning of this feast & how does it apply to us? There are basically two ways the Church uses the word "saint."

First, most commonly, when we hear the word "saint" we think of someone who has lived an extraordinary life for Christ -and so been canonized. This means they've been placed on the Church's calendar so their life for God can be celebrated and imitated. As St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, we imitate the saints, as they imitated Christ (cf. 1 Cor 11:1).

It's important to learn about these saints b/c each of them shows us an essential part of the Christian Faith.

The second way "saint" is used is in the Biblical sense. The Holy Scriptures, especially the New Testament, often refers to all of God's people as saints or "holy ones." This is an acknowledgement of the life of God that is placed in us at the time of our Baptism through Chrismation. We're called "Holy Ones" or "Saints" because we are Temples of God who dwells in us.



The Byzantine Feast of All Saints is an official recognition that there are many more saints in the Church than those on the Church's calendar. This is why in Eastern Tradition, the feast is called, "All Saints, Known and Unknown."

For example: My wife's father, John, was diagnosed with terminal cancer when he was only 35. He had a wife and four young daughters. By the age of 39 he fell asleep in the Lord. But his passing should not be considered his "losing a battle with cancer." His great witness of faith and trust in God throughout his sufferings showed many people his love for God and the power of God in his life.

As a result many of his friends and family experienced a conversion and some even came to new faith in Christ. John was actually victorious because he remained true and witnessed to Christ till His very last breath. So God brought him home to his eternal reward and the effects of his witness are still being felt by others to this day (including myself). He "fought the good fight" and had "finished the race." This is what it means to be a saint in the Biblical & second sense.

Originally the Latin Church celebrated this feast on the same day as we in the Byzantine Church. But later they moved it to October 31st. But it's not without reason that the feast of All Saints follows right after Holy Pentecost. Without the Holy Spirit, there would be no saints.

In fact everything Jesus did was ultimately to give us the Holy Spirit. As God promised in the Old Testament, "The day is coming... I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh" (Joel 2:28). The gift of the Holy Spirit is to help us fulfill God's command: "Be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44, 1 Peter 1:16).

God loves us just the way we are. But He loves us too much to leave us this way. God calls us "out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9), to turn away from sin so He can draw us up into His own Divine Life.

## **B. Scriptural Application**

Today's Apostolic Reading from Hebrews compares living our faith to running a race with our eyes totally fixed on Jesus as our finish line! And it states we have a "cloud of witnesses" surrounding us, cheering us on and interceding for us as we run our race of faith.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is very clear on what it takes to be His followers: In Matthew 10 Jesus says, "Whoever confesses Me before men, I will also confess before My Father." We have to stand up and witness before others our identity as followers of Jesus Christ.

Our Lord warns that a person who is not willing to stand up for His truth, even against his own family members is not worthy of Him! This includes pressure from one's peers, even on social media. In other words, if we will not stand up for Christ and His truth, according to Jesus, we are not worthy to be called Christian.

More and more today Christianity is becoming counter-cultural. No longer do Christians have the comfort of being in a nation where the dominant culture or even the laws are in agreement with our faith.

We must continue to pray for our country and to vote for those who will at least protect our religious freedom (for the sake of our children who have to live here). But ultimately as Christians we have to stand up and bear witness to Christ and His truth.

### **C. Personal Application**

Not all of us are called to become Mother Teresas. But all of us ARE called to become saints. How can we do this? By doing two simple things: (1) live each day for Christ and (2) tell others Who it is who calls & empowers us to live this way.

Being a saint doesn't mean being perfect. It means being forgiven. It means, according to today's Gospel, picking up our crosses and following the one who was Crucified for us -even if the crosses are our own sins -that we must face, confess and combat.

Christians, God's Holy Ones, still commit sins, but we don't "walk in them." In other words, we repent of our sins and don't allow them to become our way of life. Battling and overcoming sin is also what it means to be a saint and a Christian.

Are we living for Jesus Christ? Are we trying to influence the world with the truth of the Gospel? Or do we try to influence the Church with worldly opinions?

Ultimately being a saint means falling love with Jesus Christ. Plain and simple: Fall in love with Jesus. Give our lives over to Him.

The Church offers us an invitation, ultimately from Jesus Himself, to come, partake and rejoice, and LIVE in that fullness. Live in that truth, don't fight against it. Give in to it. Give in to the love of Jesus Christ. Put His will above ours.

To the measure that we give-in to Christ, we can all be saints. Let Him win in our lives, so that, through us, He can win in the lives of others.

Glory be to Jesus Christ!

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