

### “Saints Abound”

When I say the word saint what is the first thing that comes to your mind? It is probably one of the famous saints, like one of the apostles, or Francis, Theresa, Patrick, or Joan of Arc. You might also think of saints for reasons other than sainthood. Who do I mean? How about St. Joseph because of the baby aspirin, St. Jude Children's Hospital, or the St. Lawrence River? Of course, we cannot forget the New Orleans Saints.

I call these saints capital “S” saints. They are the people that we look to as paragons of the Church. They have exemplified the teachings of Christ on a large stage. They are recognized across parishes, communities, and nations as people of great and persistent faith. Some have endured persecution, torture, and death for their faith. Others have been great teachers of the faith or theologians. Others have lived lives of great humility that changed the direction of the Church. There are also saints who had great power or wealth and used it to help those of lesser means rather than wielding it for their own gain. All of these people are worthy of honor and emulation.

Then there are those everyday people who have the qualities of a saint. When speaking of a person, we might say she is a saint for all of the trials she has put up with. He might be a saint for all that he does for his community. Some we call saints because they are selfless when caring for others or in the midst of crises.

I think that the great Saints would be nothing but historical or religious curiosities without the little “s” saints. Capital “S” saints are heroes of the faith. They are men and women who, in extraordinary situations, did extraordinary things. Most of us will never be put in those situations and therefore will never know if we could have done the extraordinary thing. We need to know how to be faithful in the challenges of everyday life. That is why we need the little “s” saints.

We may not be called to witness to our faith in the face of martyrdom like St. Catherine of Alexandria did. But we can be a faithful and strong witness for Christ in the face of materialism and consumerism. We may not be great scholars of the faith as Thomas Aquinas was, but we can study the word of God and share what we learn with others. We may not have great wealth or power, as St. Margaret did, but we can use what we have to help others.

The small “s” way is how most of us are called to live. As we do, we are surrounded by the Great Cloud of Witnesses. These are witnesses to the faith who extend back thousands of years and forward into eternity. They may not be in the pantheon of the greats of the church, but like the regular people we remember today, they are part of building up the Kingdom of God.

There is something amazing about that description— “a cloud of witnesses.” Being among the cloud of witnesses feels like being in a meadow at daybreak, where the early morning mists swirl about me. I am enveloped in the cloud and even touched by it as the drops of water condense on me. I become a part of the cloud. The cloud of witnesses also swirls around me and welcomes me into it. Yet,

there is something different about the Cloud of Witnesses that makes it unlike other clouds.

When I am in the misty meadow, I can see only a few feet in any direction. When I am amidst the cloud of witnesses, they do not obscure my view. The cloud of witnesses makes my view clearer. Within this cloud, I see the Holy more clearly and distinctly as the everyday worries, pains, desires, and distractions are eclipsed. It is the paradox that the Cloud of Witnesses makes life appear new, bright, and clear. The Cloud of Witnesses is not cloudy.

Today, those of us still on our earthly journey pray with that Cloud of Witnesses as they pray for us. Together, our prayers strengthen the faithful and call the wandering home to God. It is the average saint who keeps the faith vibrant, fills the needs of the poor, ill, and lonely in cities, towns, and villages. Cooking a meal, holding a hand, listening to someone who is lost, praying for someone in trouble, or donating food are the acts of saints, great and small. These are the acts that draw us more closely to God, and one day into that Cloud of Witnesses that watches over all.

Episcopal priest and author Barbara Brown Taylor said that saints are exemplified by "Extravagance. Excessive love, flagrant mercy, radical affection, exorbitant charity, immoderate faith, intemperate hope, inordinate love." Joan Chittister, a Benedictine nun and author, calls saints "role models of greatness... They give us a taste of the possibilities of greatness in ourselves." Saints could also be ornery, cranky, petulant, and profoundly annoying. To be a saint did not mean to be perfect by any means.

Undoubtedly, you know people who, in whole or in part, meet the characteristics noted by Taylor and Chittister. Saints are all around us. We should also remember that St. Paul called anyone who subscribed to the Christian faith a saint. We remember many saints in today's bulletin. There are many more.

As Lesbia Scott wrote in her Hymn "I sing a song of the saints of God," "there's not any reason, no, not the least, why I shouldn't be one too." There is the possibility for all of us to be saints. Not necessarily because of our greatness, but in the ordinary ways we love and care for one another through Christ. All that we need is love to do Jesus' will immoderately, exorbitantly, radically, inordinately, with charity beyond measure. Who knows what kind of saint we will be when we put on that kind of love? Yes, you can be a saint too.

I thank God for all of the lives listed in our bulletin today. For how each of them showed us an aspect of God unique to that person, and our relationship with them. Life is like that. We catch glimpses of God in the people we love. Like an infinitely faceted diamond or sapphire that reflects God's light into the world, stunning us with its unique beauty. That light penetrates us and becomes part of us. Then it shines out into a world that needs it so.