

All Saints Day

What comes to mind when you think of a Saint?

For Protestant churches, we may have heard of some saints, we might even be able to name a few; we do have some churches named after Saints - We have St. Paul's, St. Mark's, St. John's – but exactly what is a saint and how does one become a saint?

Well, for most of us, when we think of Saints, the Catholic Church comes to mind. Maybe we have heard something on the news about the Catholic Church considering someone to become a saint. So let's look at their process.

The first thing you must do to become a Saint in the Catholic Church – is die.

Then, 5 years after your death, if anyone remembers you, they can start the process. A bishop must investigate your life and writings for evidence or heroic value.

If you pass that test, then a panel of theologians and cardinals evaluate your entire life – seeing if they can dig up any juicy gossip or a time when you might not have been “saint material”. It is pretty safe to say that the Catholic Church will never declare me a Saint.

So, if you pass that test, if nothing bad is found out about you – then the Pope decides if you have lived your life as a role model of Catholic virtues. If you have, he declares you venerable. Which means you were a good person.

That is just the first step. The next step is called beatification. This allows you to be honored by a specific region – not the whole world, only a region of the world. To be beatified you must be responsible for a miracle – after your death – unless, of course, you were martyred for your faith.

Mother Teresa was recently beatified and now she is known as Blessed Mother Teresa. In 2002, Pope John Paul II recognized the miraculous healing of a non-Christian in India who was healed of a huge abdominal tumor with nothing more than the prayers of missionaries – the credit was given as the first miracle of Mother Teresa who had died previously to this incident.

So now Mother Teresa can be recognized in India as Blessed Mother Teresa – but not a Saint yet.

The next thing that needs to happen is another miracle. Yes, there must be one more miracle that is accredited to Blessed Mother Teresa before she can be called Saint Teresa – or Saint Mother Teresa.

And this might just happen soon. Supposedly there are two other miracles that are being checked right now. A girl in Palestine reports that Mother Teresa visited her in a dream and told her that she was cured of her cancer. And a French woman had broken several ribs in a car accident, but her wounds were miraculously healed because she was wearing a Mother Teresa medallion.

Of course these claims are being checked out. It could take decades or even centuries before she is made a Saint by the Catholic Church – but I feel that since she is so popular, it won't take that long.

That is a lot of work to become a Saint. I really don't like the first step – that you must die first to become a Saint. Doesn't that take all of the fun out of becoming a Saint?

So as Protestants – or non-Catholics, can we become Saints? I am sure the Pope wouldn't recognize any of us as living the life of a perfect Catholic. So does that mean we are just out of luck? No Saints for us?

For those of you who have been coming for a while, you probably know that I like to go to the Bible to find my answers.

In today's readings, we had a lot of instructions on how to live our life.
{READ Luke 6:27-30} {READ Matt. 25:34-40}

Wow – I think it might be easier to die and do a miracle after my death. All of those things Jesus mentioned seem pretty hard to do.

I know that the Apostle Paul called some people Saints in his letters. I wonder if they were all wonderful people like Jesus tells us he wants us to be?

Let's read a couple of sentences and see what kind of people they were. If you are following along, the first one I am going to read is the first sentence in Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Now this church wasn't too bad of a church – there was some concern that they were following some wrong teachings and Paul wrote to them to get them back on track – but maybe they weren't bad people and they could have been living up to those rules that Jesus set out for us.

Let's see who else he called Saints: How about in his letter to the Romans – for those following along – we are looking at Romans Chapter 1 verse 7.

Called to be Saints – maybe he is saying that they are just all called to do well – which I think is probably true – shouldn't most of us try to live up to what Jesus asks us to do?

One more – Let's turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 2.

This is a letter Paul wrote to the church in a place called Corinth. He is calling it a church of God – and calling the people that believe in Jesus Christ - those filled with his love – Saints.

You read that and think that Corinth must have been a wonderful city. A place where everyone grew up with only the best education, the most religious of environments and only the best influences in their lives. It had to have been, wouldn't it, if all the people in church were Saints?

Well the city of Corinth had a population of 400,000 and it was a prominent center of commerce in the Mediterranean world. And like any other bustling town, it was filled with its vices. Sure it had religion. There was a temple of Venus (Aphrodite.)

It was filled with 1,000 female priests that were dedicated to prostitution in the name of religion. Pretty much for this city, name a vice and they had it.

So the church in Corinth must have been exception then, right? I mean Paul did call them Saints. They must have found a way to be above all of that stuff.

Well, no. Actually the church was having all kinds of problems, and that is why Paul wrote the letter. There were pride issues that caused a division in the church. The immorality of the city found its way into the church – parishioners stopped being modest about their appearance, and all kinds of issues.

So, if this church was having all of these problems, and they were obviously not living up to the requirements that Ellie read for us, then why on earth would the Apostle Paul call them Saints?

Unless we look at all that stuff that Ellie read for us not as requirements to become a Saint, but more of a way to enrich our lives - more of a way to become closer to Christ. Jesus said his burden was light – in other words he was telling us he didn't have a lot of rules that we had to follow – but he showed us a life that God wants us to work towards – a way of life that is more fulfilling.

Okay, I can live with that. So those aren't requirements to be a Saint. So how do you become a Saint? Well, let's go back to Paul's letter and see if the answer is there. He said, "To those sanctified in Christ, called to be saints." When I look at those words, sanctified in Christ, I think of those who have taken that first step to believe in Jesus – and truly are ready to accept Him into their lives.

So using that definition, that would mean that those who have taken that first step to believe in Jesus and want to have to God in their daily lives, that those people would be called a Saint.

So we need to ask ourselves, where are we on our faith journeys? Are we someone that Paul would have called a Saint and have taken our first step to believe in Jesus Christ – or are we someone that isn't quite to that point yet and possibly waiting on an invitation?

I believe Christ invites everyone to Him who is ready to begin their faith journey or continue their faith journey. Because it is a journey; to be all these things Jesus would like us to be it can take a lifetime – or probably even longer.

But Christ has given us all an invitation to accept Him into our lives.

One way we can respond to that invitation is through Holy Communion.

Christ invites to His table all who are ready to take that first step out in faith and believe in Him, all who have already taken that step, and **even those** who aren't ready to take that step, but wish to partake in Holy Communion as they continue searching for answers.

By the Catholic Church's definition, you must be dead to become a Saint. But I think I like the Apostle Paul's definition better: when you truly come alive and accept Christ into your life, then you are a Saint – no dying required.

Pastor: Mark Maddox

520- 207-6453

pastor@umcSanctuary.org

www.umcSanctuary.org