

## SAINTS

### Introduction

1. Most of us will probably feel very uncomfortable if someone were to call us a saint. This is because we are probably too aware of our imperfections to accept such a title.
2. Yet, if you look into the Bible, you will note that in the early Church, all faithful members were called “saints”.
3. In fact, St. Paul’s favourite term for addressing members of Christian communities is “saints”.

Eg. Eph. 1:1 → “the saints who are at Ephesus”

2 Cor 1:1 → “saints that are in the whole of Achaia”

4. The word “saint” comes from the Latin word “sanctus” which means “holy”. As Father mentioned “holy” means kept apart, different. Every Christian who is baptised and has the Holy Spirit in him is holy and is a “saint” in the ordinary meaning of the word.
5. We need to make a distinction between “saints” with small “s” and “Saints” with big “S”. “Saints” generally refer, nowadays, to souls who are with God in heaven and which are officially recognized by the Catholic Church as such. A Saint can be defined as a privileged or chosen soul who, because of his or her total faith and love for God and neighbour lived a life of heroic virtue in a constant or preserving manner (or who died a martyr’s death) and who imitated Christ’s life and teaching according to the Gospel.
6. Saints are so important because they show us that we can live as Christ commanded – to take up our cross and follow Him. Later, when we look at the lives of some Saints, we will see that they are actually very ordinary people like us, facing the same problem and temptations.

7. Therefore, Saints are an inspiration to us who often lack faith, motivation and meaning in life. They are real life, flesh-&-blood people who have succeeded against all odds to win the crown of eternal life.

## **Communion of Saints**

1. “Communion” means “union with”. Therefore, we believe that there exists a union or a fellowship among all souls in whom dwells the Holy Spirit.
2. This fellowship includes:
  - (a) members of the Church here on earth (Church Militant because we are still struggling and fighting against sin and error)
  - (b) souls in purgatory (Church suffering) – these cannot yet see God but the Holy Spirit is with them, never to be lost again
  - (c) souls in heaven – Church Triumphant
3. What does “communion of saints” mean to us?

It means that all of us who are united in Christ have to be mindful of the need of one another.

- (a) Souls in heaven cannot be so rapt in their bliss that they forget the souls left behind. Indeed, because of their perfect love for God, they too love all the souls in whom God dwells. In fact, the saints in heaven often pray for us and the souls in purgatory so as to help all of us onward into heaven.
- (b) We in turn must revere and honour the saints in heaven not just because they can and do pray for us but because our love for God demands it. When we honour the saints, we are actually honouring their maker. Just as when you praise a painting, you are actually praising the artist. It is important to remember that all souls in heaven, not only those canonized by the Catholic Church, deserve our honour. That’s why we celebrate All Saints’ Day to honour the entire Church Triumphant.

- (c) At the same time, we have to pray for the suffering souls in purgatory who cannot pray for themselves. We can relieve their sufferings and speed them onto heaven by our prayers for them, by the Masses we offer.
  - (d) Finally, we also have to pray for one another and to take care of each other by performing spiritual and corporal works of mercy.
4. It is important to remember that Catholics venerate and honour saints but do not worship them. Worship is due to God alone.

### **“Dos” and “Don’ts” of Devotion to Saints**

1. We must always be careful not to fall prey to certain distortions that may arise from devotions to saints.
2. Saints are not influential friends in high places who manipulate a politics of grace.
3. Catholics do not need saints to get closer to God. We shouldn’t think of them as doors that have to be passed before encountering Christ. In fact, through grace, we enter directly into union with Christ.
4. It is important not to let devotions to saints obscure the primary importance of the Mass as the center of all Catholic worship. To be extreme in devotion to saints so that it almost becomes a cult of saints is dangerous especially when it threatens to rival the worship of Christ.

### **The Making of Saints**

1. Briefly and simply speaking, a soul will be declared a saint if the following are present:
  - (a) life of heroic virtue or authentic martyrdom
  - (b) authentic and continuous reputation of sanctity

- (c) miracles or wonders from God attributed to that person

2. Heroic virtue

- (a) Traditionally, there are 2 types of virtues which the Church will study whenever it has to decide if a soul is to be canonized:
  - (i) theological virtues (faith, hope and love)
  - (ii) cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance)
- (b) It is necessary to prove that the candidate for canonization practised both the theological and cardinal virtues in a fashion greater than ordinary and more than occasionally. What this implies is that heroism is the use of ordinary virtues which God has given in a thoroughly consistent and determined manner.
- (c) Such virtues must be displayed in the candidate's day-to-day existence, in accordance with the state, place and circumstances in which God has placed him.
- (d) Love – the ultimate act of love is seeing God in everyone we encounter. It is the basis of all other virtues: patience, humility, gentleness etc. Love for God must come 1<sup>st</sup> in order to love others.
- (e) Hope – based on one's faith in God. It is this virtue that allows saints to look confidently towards the next life in the midst of struggle and suffering.
- (f) Faith – linked to hope because if one does not have hope, it really means that he does not have faith.
- (g) Temperance – helps to moderate the senses and controls one's bodily impulses, thoughts and actions.
- (h) Fortitude – gives one strength and courage to overcome trial, doubt and suffering.

- (i) Justice – imparts obedience, truthfulness and fairness towards God and neighbour.
- (j) Prudence – helps one to make proper judgments concerning right from wrong, good from bad and to recognize and avoid the act of sin.

All of us have these virtues but the candidate must practise them to a level that it is heroic (extra-ordinary) and in a constant fashion.

### 3. Martyrdom

- (a) Martyrdom is the death of a follower of Christ brought about through hatred of the faith. The victim must have died for the faith voluntarily and according to free will.
- (b) Normally, the act of martyrdom implies the shedding of blood but people can be martyred without blood loss.
- (c) The person who caused the death of the person must have done it out of hatred for the faith. Such hatred can be expressed in several ways:
  - (i) a religious persecution representing a particular social/political ideology
  - (ii) a disregard for faith generally
  - (iii) hatred for particular virtues
- (d) The martyr must have died in defense of the faith – implies a heroic sacrifice of one's own life because of that person's particular religious belief.
- (e) Martyrdom also recognizes a sacrificial act that has Christ as the main object of one's love and devotion.

### 4. Reputation of Sanctity

- (a) Sanctity is really another name for holiness. It is both the state of sacredness and act of consecration to the living God.
- (b) This involves piety because it is a devotion of religious duties, to acts which are expressions of one's deep commitment to God.
- (c) How are seeds of sanctity sown? (i) there is a calling by God to share in his holiness; (ii) authentic response to God's call.

#### 5. Miracles

- (a) 2 miracles are needed – one for beatification and 1 for canonization.
- (b) Must be attributed to the candidate
- (c) As if it is a confirmation from God of the candidate's heroic virtue and sanctity
- (d) 7 criteria must be met to be called miracle:
  - (i) disease or illness must be serious and impossible or extremely difficult to cure by human means
  - (ii) disease or illness must not be at a stage where it could be healed or cured through its own natural progression
  - (iii) proven that no medical treatment contributed to the cure/healing
  - (iv) cure/healing must be instantaneous
  - (v) cure/healing must be complete
  - (vi) cure/healing must be permanent
  - (vii) cure/healing must not occur immediately after a sudden change or trauma which would imply that the cure/healing occurred through natural means

### **Beatification and Canonization**

1. Beatification is a formal declaration by the Pope recognizing that a particular servant of God, because of the practice of heroic virtues or because of genuine martyrdom is deserving the title Blessed and may receive restricted public ecclesiastical cult. Restriction normally limited to particular place, region or Religious Order.
2. Canonization – definitive declaration by Pope that a particular servant of God is a saint, now in heaven and enjoys beatific vision of God.

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