

*Lord, open our ears to hear your Word spoken to us; Open our eyes to see you right in front of us. Amen.*

Happy All Saints, everybody. This is our Sunday, the feast day that celebrates us. Saints are simply members of the household of God; some we would call saintly, some not so much.

Saints are those who believe that Jesus Christ was Son of God and rose from the dead. Saintliness is a by-product, not a precondition. A saint is what you get when you take a human being and add water and faith.

Being a saint does not mean we are good and kind and pure of heart all the time. I am not fond of the phrase, so-and-so is a "good person." We're all a mix of good and not so good. As Jesus said when someone called him "Good Teacher" – "No one is good but God alone." Any goodness we can claim comes by virtue of God's love running through us.

I don't believe God is much interested in us being "good people." I believe God wants us to be real people, aware of our gifts and our flaws, aware of our need for love.

Most of the saints I know, or know about, were decidedly flawed. You don't have to look any further than the saints we call the apostles of Jesus Christ to see that sainthood has little to do with being good. St. Peter flunked that test a few times over, as did St. Paul. Mother Theresa said she had trouble hanging on to her faith in God at all. What's important about us as God's saints is not so much what we DO and how we behave; it's who we ARE what we believe.

Knowing who we are starts with whose we are. We are sons, daughters, children of the living God, adopted siblings of Jesus Christ himself, who loved us and gave himself for us before we did a blessed thing to deserve it. Our baptismal certificates are also adoption papers – beyond our own families we are added to an even greater family, the family of God. We started being saints of God the moment we be-longed, and we grow as saints of God as we put that Be-ing before the Do-ing, letting the Do-ing grow out of the Be-ing.

Those who are baptized are made saints by God's action,  
before they can do a thing to prove themselves.

This world is big on proving yourself. God's realm is about being proven by God.  
As we accept that truth, let it in, and get off the "I'm a good person" treadmill;  
As we start to let the power of God work in our lives  
we actually start to look a little more like those saints we read about.

So why don't we feel more "saintly" most of the time?

Why is there not-good mixed in with the good in us?

Why do we feel like we have to earn love, earn affirmation?

The church has a term for this: original sin, the notion that the primal rebellion  
recorded in the book of Genesis is something that comes through our DNA,  
is woven into who we are.

It's not the whole story – some talk about Original Blessing to remind us that was  
also part of the story, but there is also sin, that sense of not ever quite  
measuring up, never being good enough. If someone says to me,  
"Kate I want to talk to you" my first thought is, "What did I do?"

That is something we might call Original Shame. That's also in that garden story  
as for the first time that first woman and man naked – and not in a good way.  
That also means they had split off from themselves a bit, because to watch  
yourself means you're not fully integrated. Shame comes along with that.

Anyone else ever feel like that, a vague sense of "I'm in trouble..."

There's a story that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle once sent a telegram to five  
prominent men in England with the message, "All is discovered. Flee at once."  
And within 24 hours they'd all left the country.

Some of us grow up with the sense that we're in trouble with God, that we  
haven't pleased God enough. I always apologize for not praying more regularly.  
But once I did pray and apologized for not doing it more, and I immediately sensed  
these words in my mind: "Kate, I love you I delight you. There is nothing you  
can do or have to do to make me love you more because I already love you  
the most. You can stop achieving, stop producing, stop measuring up.  
I already love you the most. Nothing can change that."

I know I've told that story before, but I can never hear it enough.

I'm still trying to accept it, still trying to live like a saint that God loves us the most.

Friends, God delights us so everything we do flows out of that,  
not out of us trying to earn; not out of obligation but grace.

It's out of that grace that we are enabled to be more saintly.

It's out of that love, that we learn to love in a way that looks like holiness. Love is pretty much our only job, though the world tries to throw so many at us. And love is not always easy – just ask Jesus. But it gets easier as we let the love of God flow through us, when we love out of that unlimited store, not out of our own limited supply. Love is what the world needs from us, now more than ever.

Whatever the outcome of this election, and however long it takes to know that, and however much upheaval we see in that waiting, people will need our love. As we heard in our gospel today, and studying what Jesus did and taught, we can conclude that there are two categories of people in the world – neighbors, whom Jesus told us to love, and enemies, whom Jesus told us to love. That pretty much sums it up! Does that kind of love seem possible?

By ourselves, maybe, probably not. But we are no longer just ourselves. When we are baptized, we are given a new identity – an eternal identity. The first one, the one we're born with, is only our identity in this lifetime. The second, our saintly and eternal identity we get at baptism. From the beginning of time God destined us to be adopted as his own children through Christ. The Creator of the Universe, the all-powerful God and Maker of all things has adopted us, and put at our disposal now the vast inheritance we will one day enjoy in fullness. We have already received a pledge of our inheritance, the gift of the Holy Spirit working in us and through us, knowledge, power and love.

That's how we become saints, not by our behavior modification, but by allowing the Holy Spirit free reign in us. We grow more saintly as we increase our capacity to love, to hold God's power and grace, and learn to carry that contagious love into the world. At our best, as saints of God we spread viral love, clustering to infect people with hope and dignity, scattering to carry this love far and wide. What if we think of saints as viral cells that strengthen rather than weaken the bodies with whom they come into contact? Who help people become whole?

Who might you want to “infect” with hope, compassion, dignity, love? How can we carry God's contagious love into our community? Pray, “Come, Holy Spirit.” That's how saints become saintly.  
**Amen.**

**Mark 12:28-34**

One of the scribes came near and heard the Sadducees disputing with one another, and seeing that Jesus answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’ —this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.