

## What Is a Saint?

A question that has come up through the ages is "What is a saint?" Related to that is "How does one become a saint?" as well as other questions about sainthood. Over the centuries, a saint has been come to be known as someone who had led a 'Godly life,' a life of service to God for the benefit of others. The Roman Catholic church has specific criteria in order to be canonized as a saint and it can be a long process, one that takes several years following the person's death. The underlying belief behind the idea of sainthood is that it is a lifestyle that a person has chosen to follow, that it was their decision to do those things that were considered to be 'holy.' Achieving sainthood was something that was obtained after a person's death. To be called a 'saint' while one is still alive typically has a negative connotation to it - a person is a goody-two-shoes, one who follows all the rules and does nothing wrong.

However, when one looks at the Biblical understanding of what a saint is, then one gets a different perception. From a Biblical point of view, the simplest understanding of who is a saint is simply someone who believes in Jesus Christ as the Messiah and Savior of the world. These are believers that are alive, walking around and interacting with others. So, in order to become a 'saint,' all one needs to do is to believe that Jesus died for the forgiveness of our sins and in that and His resurrection from the dead has given us a new life. This life is defined not by obtaining things for one's own pleasure. Rather it is a life that is modeled after the life and teachings of Jesus, a life that is in service to others and is obedient to God's word and will.

So, the question remains, "What is a saint and how does one become a saint?" If we go with the basic definition that a saint is a holy person, we then can ask, "What makes a person holy?" In looking at the Biblical record, a holy person is one who is in a right relationship with God. A person who ultimately

follows God and does what God wants them to do. It is not anything that the person does, but it is God's actions that draws the person towards God to do God's will. We also see that places where God had shown God's self to people is considered holy. For example, Moses considered the place around the burning bush to be holy. There are other examples of places that are considered to be holy because of an encounter with God there. We can then conclude that it is the presence of God that makes a person or a place holy. As Christians, we can conclude that a person is holy, or a saint, by the presence of God, by the spirit of God and Jesus Christ which is given to us through our baptism. So, by virtue of our baptisms, we are made saints.

The Gospel accounts tell us how it is that we are to live as saints, as believers of Jesus Christ. In today's Gospel reading, we hear Luke's version of the Beatitudes. Unlike Matthew's account which has more of a spiritual tone to them. Luke's version is more 'earthly' rooted more in the everyday lives of people. Luke presents the Beatitudes as "Blessings and Woes" format which one could easily come to a wrong conclusion. In order to be blessed, one must be poor, hungry or suffering in any way. In other words, we need to be like all of those people who are on the fringes of society, those people who society needs to perform the menial jobs or those people who need society for support, yet are not recognized as a full member of society. These are not positions in society to which one aspires. Rather one tries to achieve those things that Jesus lists as 'woes.' We could get the wrong impression that Jesus is talking against having and enjoying the good things that life has to offer. This would be counter to the belief in society that when one has those things, then one is often blessed by God. I think that what Jesus is really getting at here is that when we make it our goal to have those things, then we replace God as our priority and those things then become our idol.

The way that Luke presents this teaching of Jesus, one could almost say that life is a series of cycles that is punctuated by blessings and woes, or punishments. When we do not have anything, when others take advantage of us and use us for their benefit, then God sees us, takes us out of the situation and we become blessed. However, those blessings slowly become our idol and we do what we can to keep those blessings for ourselves. We are then punished for it and they are taken away which puts us back to not having anything. This cycle that Jesus presents is one that was repeated by the Israelites numerous times in the Old Testament. A cycle which has been repeated throughout history by many societies.

Another way to see this text would be to see it from God's perspective. In order to bless someone, or even to punish someone, that person must be seen, must be acknowledged. So, we can see from this text that God sees everyone. No one escapes the sight of God. We can then see Jesus warning us not to let the blessings that God gives us become our idol and we strive only to enjoy those blessings and amass more of them for ourselves.

It would not be too much of a stretch to take these blessings and woes and extend it to our notion of being a saint and a sinner at the same time. We can picture our lives as a continuum with a saint at one end and a sinner at the other end. At our creation, God made us in God's image and thus, we are a saint. However, because we were made in God's image, we have made choices in our lives that are more reflective of being a sinner. The end of our life's journey, as a believer in Jesus takes us to fully being a saint, living eternally in the glory of God. God, through the Holy Spirit, watches us as we make our ways on this journey of life, guiding us along that path that God wishes us to take, punishing and blessing us along the way in order to keep us on that path to the eternal, life-giving kingdom.

As we remember those saints who have come before us and remain close in our hearts and now rest in that eternal kingdom, may we see how they reflected God's love for them to us, using the blessings given to them and may we be a reflection of God's love for others as we have been blessed by the Holy Spirit.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: [https://youtu.be/e3mRXS\\_Iqnw](https://youtu.be/e3mRXS_Iqnw)

Service: <https://youtu.be/FjNZBbKyu3Q>