

# All Saints Day – Who's a Saint?

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All Saints – Daniel 7 1-3, 15-18, Psalm 149, Ephesians 1 11-23, Luke 6 20-31

Who's a Saint? Is it a really good person – always cheerful and kind? Is it someone whose effect on the world around them is so powerful that miracles happen? That's how some saints get their official title. But then some people are described as having the patience of a saint – so is patience a saintly qualification, even if it doesn't get them officially recognised? Should being very patient get them their saint gong? Are there other credentials like that?

The people who lead our Sunday prayers often mention the big-name saints for the week – saints who have a whole day dedicated to their memory. But what about average workaday saints – do you know any? I reckon we all do.

The letter to the Ephesians begins by saying that it's written 'to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus', <sup>(1b)</sup> so that means more or less every Christian there is a saint on a good day.

But why don't we know their names? In the whole letter, no Ephesian is singled out by name. So maybe modesty is saintly too. Whatever the case, this letter assumes pretty well everyone there is worthy of being called a saint. Why; how? Today we read about their 'love toward all the saints'; <sup>(15)</sup> that they could hope to share the glorious inheritance of the saints <sup>(18)</sup> because they were blessed with a spirit of wisdom and revelation to enlighten their hearts. <sup>(17)</sup>

That's a bit more than just being patient, isn't it. They're loving, they're wise and they're enlightened. But importantly, these qualities are described as gifts they've been given. That's emphasised in the verses that come before the passage we heard today. These verses explain that all these blessings come from Jesus in whom they – and we – have been adopted, redeemed and forgiven. <sup>(vv. 5-7)</sup> They're free gifts; unearned grace. All saints receive these gifts; it's something we call being sanctified; set apart. 'All saints' includes you and me. Let's think about that.

Today we see how Jesus does this amazing thing in his followers. So please turn back to our gospel for today so we can see him at work making people saints.

He started before today's passage up on a mountain praying all night, before choosing twelve of his disciples as apostles. Then he set to work forming them. He came down the hill with them to a level place where they gathered with 'a great crowd of his disciples as well as a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon'. Everyone is there – crowds of disciples, and multitudes of Jews and Gentiles listening in on his teaching. So, his first lesson to his disciples is that no-one is excluded.

Jesus heals everyone who asks – no insiders or outsiders – and then, in the presence of all these people, he looks up at his disciples and says what we just heard; the four blessings, the four equal and opposite woes, and then his teaching about love for enemies and the Golden Rule – do unto others.

The four blessings declare God's love for those who experience exclusion. The four woes challenge the people whose wealth, comfort, ease and prestige cause the exclusion which blights the poor, the hungry, the grieving and the despised.

But in case we mistake this for a re-introduced *us-and-them* mentality, Jesus wipes it away with his challenges to love

enemies, to do good to those who hate us, pray for our abusers, turn the other cheek, to give more to those who take from us, to give to those who beg from us and to renounce our rights to belongings. These are very hard words for us to hear. They're the language of the '*upside-down Kingdom of God*'; more difficult for wealthy, contented people than for the majority world.

Those contrasting blessings and woes, and then Jesus' amazing commands confront us with a choice to follow the lead which Jesus gives in his teaching today, and which he lived and died for the world. Saints choose to receive the gift of living this teaching, and in doing so, reveal the kingdom of God. If our epistle is addressed to Adelaide rather than Ephesus, you and I are called saints. What are the implications of that for you?

It's not an easy path to follow; it's often a very dangerous path. Yet it's a gift we can choose to receive. Today, we thank God for all the saints who have received and lived this gift and who challenge us to receive and live it too. Amen