

Revelation 7:14

Sainthood isn't for everyone. Billy Joel sings, "I'd rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints;" and many people share his sentiments. "If being a saint means that I can't have any fun; if it means that I have to live by following the rules, well then, count me out." People don't object to the idea of being a saint; they just don't want to have to live like one.

But how, exactly, does a saint live? Some Old Testament saints were Abraham, Moses, and David. Abraham doubted that God could give him a son through his wife Sarah, so he shared his bed with Hagar. Moses murdered an Egyptian. David murdered Uriah after sleeping with his wife Bathsheba. Some New Testament saints were Peter and Paul, James and John. Peter usually spoke before he thought. He denied Christ three times when confronted by strangers. Paul had been a violent persecutor of Christians. James and John were rebuked by Jesus because they wanted to show no mercy to a Samaritan village.

People may think that saints are holier than everyone else, but no one in the Bible lives up to that image—and we certainly don't either. If we're saints, then we sure don't act like it. We may want to live right, but we don't follow-through too well. I know I don't. I have not lived one day of my life where, at the end of the day, I was perfectly satisfied with all my thoughts, words, and actions. Rather, every day I have said things that I should not have said. I have done things I should not have done. I have failed to do things which were good and right; and I have had thoughts that I should not have had. And if you compare yourself to God's holy Law, you'll find yourself in the same shoes that I wear.

There is no need for any of us to have a "holier-than-thou" attitude, because none of us is holy; not one of us lives an exemplary life. If being a saint is defined by how a person lives, none of us would qualify. But then, if we don't live like saints, why would God ever let us into heaven?

I hear people laughing about this now and then. Just last week two men were joking about going to hell. "I know I'm going there," the one said. And the other laughed, "Well, at least I'll be there to keep you company." We shouldn't be shocked at this flippant attitude towards heaven and hell. Why should anyone be afraid of going to hell when little kids dress up in devil costumes for Halloween? Who objects anymore? It's supposed to be cute. There is no fear of God; no respect for what is sacred.

No wonder people sing along with Billy Joel, "I'd rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints;" because the world laughs at what God says. "Hell won't be that bad... heck, with all my friends there, it will be like one great big party!" What can you say in response to such stupidity? Really...nothing. If someone is driving like a maniac on the interstate, you just get out of their way and let them wreck. And when someone is flat out determined to reject what God says, just don't let them take you to hell with them.

God did not give His holy Word to the unbelieving world. He gives it to you in His Church. He will not be mocked. He will not throw His pearls to the swine. Let the world have its fun. Let them laugh now. One day they will cry in misery, and their cry will not be heard by God. And it will be a cry that will never come to an end.

But God has better things in store for you, because you are His saints. And it does not have to do with living a “good” life. It has to do with Jesus Christ and His blood shed for you. In his vision in Revelation, John sees all the saints in heaven, after time is no more, and here’s what is said about them: “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” It does not say, “These are God’s saints because they lived better lives than everyone else.” It does not say that God’s saints sinned less or prayed more. It says two things about them—they struggled through tribulation, and they washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. That’s why their robes are white. That’s why they are the saints of God.

Do you struggle...or do you find it easy to live as a Christian in an unbelieving world? God’s saints struggle. They are tempted night and day to go along with the world. They are tempted to abandon their place in God’s family and spend their time laughing with the sinners. God’s saints struggle because they are fighting the good fight of faith. To stop struggling is to give up the fight. Do you know someone who has given up? Someone who has abandoned ship? Who is being carried along on the currents of living for themselves and neglecting the Word of God? They’re all around us. And we, too, are tempted to give in. We are tempted to stop fighting against sin. And this struggle will never get easier. But take comfort—“for us fights the valiant One whom God Himself elected.”

Jesus faced temptation just as we do. He kept fighting. He did not give up. And He did it for you, so that you can find rest in His holy life; and so you can find shelter in His holy wounds. Jesus did not live without sin for His own sake. He was innocent in thought, word, and deed so that He could exchange His innocence for your sinfulness. In your baptism God declared you His saint because in those waters you are covered with the holy life Jesus lived for you. He became the sinner...you became the saint.

He also died for you so that you can wash your robe in His blood. We confess that we are not saints, but that we are poor, miserable sinners. But in Christ, and for His sake, God names you His saint by forgiving all your sins. When you come up to God’s altar this morning you are declaring two things: First, that you need what God gives here because you are a poor sinner; second, that what God gives here is for you—that Jesus didn’t just shed His blood on the cross, but He shed His blood for you. He died for all sinners, but you are God’s saints because He brings you here to the blood of the Lamb where forgiveness, life, and salvation are given. You are God’s saints because when you hear His word of Absolution spoken by your pastor, He gives you the faith to grasp those words for your own; to believe that, no matter how wicked your life, you are forgiven by Jesus Christ for all your wickedness.

I doubt very much that you and I will be remembered one thousand years from now (if the world stands that long). We remember saints like Abraham, Moses, Peter, and Paul. We often even put a saint before their name: St. Peter, St. Paul, St. John. People won’t remember us in that way...but that’s alright. What really matters is that we will be a part of that great multitude of God’s saints in heaven. What really matters is that we have washed our robes in the blood of Christ. What really matters is that we don’t give up the struggle—we keep fighting the good fight of faith by remaining in God’s Word. What matters is that you are who you are, not because of how you have lived, but because Jesus lived and died for you.

And so you can live as a saint—God’s saint. And that doesn’t mean feeling pressured to always “hit the mark” day after day; to never mess up. But it means to believe that you are forgiven. Even when you mess up royally, God forgives you. To be God’s saint is a life lived in Christ; a life always covered by His blood; a life that continues, in Him, through all eternity. Amen.