

Prologue: This is the thin time, when the veil between the worlds becomes translucent. Heaven is close. Those who have gone before us gather near, an immense cloud of witnesses. Do you feel the presence of those souls special to you who have died? They are here. They are here with all the saints from all times and places who have ever served God. For God is the God of the living.

Today we celebrate All Saints. From very early in Christianity, some people were considered to have a special level of holiness which enabled them to be called a **Saint** (with a capital S).

The BBC wrote a piece in 2014 on the steps required if you want to become a Saint in the eyes of the Vatican:

1. Wait a minimum of 5 years after your death (though this waiting period can be waived at the Pope's discretion).
2. Become a 'servant of God' – this achievement is affirmed after investigation into your life and deeds, including the testimony of those who knew you.
3. Show proof of a life of 'heroic virtue' – evidence of your holiness, work and signs that people have been drawn to prayer through your example. If that proof exists, you will then be considered "venerable".

4. There needs to have been a verified miracle that has occurred attributed to prayers made to you after your death. If this step has been achieved, you are beatified and called “blessed”. There is one exception to this requirement – a martyr, someone who died for their faith, can be beatified without a verified miracle having occurred.
5. The final step is canonization – this step requires a 2nd miracle attributed to you and then you are called a Saint, though if you are a martyr, you only need 1 miracle at this point to become a Saint.

In the Anglican Communion a Saint is someone who has been elevated to that status by popular opinion as a pious and holy person. It feels a bit out of most of our reach, doesn't it! But the biblical meaning of the word saint is **anyone** who is a committed believer and follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, whether they're alive on earth or in heaven, and regardless of popular opinion. And I really like this meaning.

We all have known people in our lives, who may have died or who might still be living, but who come to mind when we think of a 'saintly' person. Can you think of someone you've known personally who has had saintly qualities? And what were these

qualities? And I hope that you can recognize some characteristics within yourselves that you could call 'saintly'.

This past week I asked five people at our church campus these very questions. And in honor of the fact that we are **all** saints, here are some of their answers, in their own words:

Saint 1's response: A saintly person I've known: It was my landlady who lived next door to us when I was younger. She demonstrated saintliness by welcoming people into her home. She always offered me the very first cup of coffee to come out of her coffee maker, which was the best. She engendered a better world, and made other people feel loved. I too am a saint as I try to help people see their capacity for goodness in themselves, by loving God and trying to do God's will, and appreciating God's creation.

Saint 2's response: A saintly person I've known: Mary Tooby who died 10 years ago who always helped people, visited the sick, secretly sponsored people and worked for the church teaching Sunday School and telling fortunes at the Halloween party...! I too am a saint as I try to follow Jesus Christ to the best of my ability , but fail miserably. I too feel called to visit the sick.

Saint 3's response: A saintly person I've known: at times this has been a complete stranger – someone who shows kindness and compassion, understanding and empathy. I too am a saint as I try to like everybody and offend nobody, but I still struggle, especially in avoiding road rage in bad traffic! I do believe that compassion is a lifestyle.

Saint 4's response: A saintly person I've known (and this is someone who was in church during the week but attends another church): I think of my pastor's wife as saintly. When I first attended church she was always there to welcome and talk with you. She welcomed every person, especially new people and made them feel they belonged. She grocery-shopped for me when I had surgery and couldn't drive. She always encourages everyone in godly things. I too am a saint because I follow Jesus and trust in Him for salvation. I try to do saintly service: providing for widows, training children in the ways of the Lord, being a loving wife, honoring my parents, making peace with all when possible. I've heard it simplified as our ministry on Earth is to know God and make Him known.

Saint 5's response: A saintly person I've known: I have an Aunt Wilma who is nearly 88 years old who has supported me held my hand as a loved one died, encouraged me when I was discouraged,

prays incessantly and trusts God in all things. She is who I wish to emulate. She is kind, loving forgiving and always a willing giver – she’s just a joy to spend time with. I am not saintly! But I love the Lord with all my heart. I try to practice Jesus’s teaching and remember we are all God’s creatures. I pray daily that the Holy Spirit never leaves me and opens my mind, heart and spirit to the suffering of others and to be more caring and generous.

I wonder whether hearing these saint’s stories, a person or some people have come to your mind that you have known whose life and behavior was or is saintly? I invite you to think of them now and to name them aloud.

Our bible readings set for today all describe for us wonderful characteristics of God. Our Old Testament reading speaks of the Lord of hosts – the Lord of inclusive welcome and lavish hospitality – the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces – this is a Lord of compassion, empathy and kindness.

The Psalm speaks of the earth and all that is in it belonging to the Lord who created it. The Psalmist speaks of a Lord who blesses and rewards with salvation.

Our New Testament reading from Revelation describes a God who wants to live with his people – a relational, caring and healing God. A re-creating and all-encompassing God.

And our Gospel passage shows Jesus weeping, disturbed and moved by the grief of his friends over the death of Lazarus. Jesus performs a miracle, bringing Lazarus back to life. Jesus said to Martha, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the **glory** of God?” This ‘glory’ refers to the open display of God’s good will - his loving salvation and redeeming purpose.

We now will have an Act of Remembrance for our loved ones who have died (lighting of candles)...