

Saint Search
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Mark 12:28-34
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All Saints Day

Some people are clamoring for a new saint. Or maybe an old one who's ready to become the patron of a new realm.

Meet the already sainted Isidore of Seville, last of the ancient Christian philosophers, probably the most learned man of his era and an immeasurably influential instigator of education in the Middle Ages. He was the author of the twenty-volume magnum opus *Etymologiae*, and a determined compiler of the world's existing knowledge. It was a bulky book, but jam-packed with useful data.

For his efforts, Saint Isidore has been placed on the short list of spiritual superstars being considered for the role of patron saint of the Internet. And why not? Pasta eaters have their own patron saint. So do tax collectors, beggars, seekers of lost causes, students and people with sore throats or troubled marriages. Maybe the time has come for a certified cyber-saint.

Support is growing for the idea, with Isidore an early favorite. Also in the running is San Pedro Regalado who was said to have appeared in two places simultaneously, at the monasteries of La Aguilera and El Abrojo, which lie 48 miles apart. In addition to this miracle, the priest was a renowned navigator -- so in terms of exploring the world of virtual reality, you'd have to say that San Pedro Regalado has been "all over the map."

But some folks are objecting to attaching a saint from the past to technology of the present. They suggest finding a modern figure. How about ... Saint Gates of Microsoft?

Naaaah.

So, just who is a saint? How does a person become a saint? Today's passage from Mark drops a few hints. Someone asks Jesus what is the greatest commandment, and he responds by citing the Shema -- "Hear, O Israel ... you shall love the Lord your God" -- and adding "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:29-31). When the

questioner affirms Jesus' response, Jesus says, "You are not far from the kingdom." (v.34) Even though this curious questioner is not a bona fide, official, one-of-the-twelve disciples, he is able to grasp and accept the truth of Jesus' teaching.

Sounds like God is on a saint search, looking for people headed for the kingdom. Qualifications seem to be acknowledging that God is the one true God, and then showing love that flows in two directions, to God and to our neighbor. A saint is not necessarily a scholarly superstar like Saint Isidore of Seville, or even a supernatural steeplechaser like San Pedro Regalado ... instead; a saint is simply a person who lives out an intense devotion to both God and neighbor.

But can we spot them? Not necessarily, at least not at first glance. Back in the 1920s, a divorced woman worked for a series of leftist periodicals and lived a bohemian life in New York's Greenwich Village. In 1927, she became a Catholic, and then led a quiet rebellion within the church to reach out to the poor, the needy and the desperate. She was a pacifist, an anarchist and a crusader for social justice -- not your standard-issue saint!

And yet, her name is being processed these days in the great saint-making machine, even though she said before her death in 1980 that she wasn't interested. No joke. This woman, Dorothy Day, lived one of the most highly-regarded lives in the modern church, but said she never wanted to become a saint because she didn't "want to be dismissed that easily." During the depression, Day set up a network of soup kitchens where people could come to eat and sleep, and her Catholic Worker movement -- as well as her following -- soon spread nationwide. But Day resisted accolades and attempts to portray her work as anything but ordinary. She saw herself as a simple woman seeking to live in the gospel -- a person who demonstrated nothing more than an intense devotion to both God and neighbor.

God went deep into the most desperate parts of a sin-sick city and came up with Dorothy Day, a woman that the archbishop of New York recently called "a model for all in the third millennium."

But wait a second ... not everyone's a saint. In fact, most are far from it. What about those who are a long way from the kingdom, or at least on a significant detour? How did they lose their way? And how can they find their way back?

Rev. Grant writes, "Some get lost because they haven't received good directions from earthly parents or haven't learned how to listen for guidance from God. Others stray because their judgment is clouded -- they are driving while drugged, drunk or debilitated by earthly desires. Others race after big thrills and big money, and risk losing their hearts, souls and minds in the process.

But there is always hope because God is always saint-searching. The way back to the right path -- the kingdom path -- always begins at the very same place: At the point where God in Christ reaches across miles and missteps and a multitude of messy mortal mistakes, at the point where Jesus wraps his arms around the shoulders of wayward, wandering souls and gently guides them back. Christ doesn't discard people because they're moving down an imperfect path -- look at how warmly he addressed the scribe in today's Scripture lesson (v. 34). Nor does he disqualify people who have made a mess of their lives before finding the right road -- Dorothy Day became quite Christ-like after living a very difficult life.

God is on a saint search. Can we find any here? Remember, modern day saints aren't expected to be perfect. They are only expected to love God with all of their being. Who might you recall when thinking about saints? I know quite a few of you might say Mary Milks. Who else???

Saints are remembered in the Catholic Church with candles and shrines. But they are remembered in the Methodist Church in a different way. When you think of Christian Education, you might think of Sue Welch. When you think of the church copier you might think Leah Pawlisch or Wilma Nenneman. But other things too have been donated in memory of the saints of this church. If you look at the acolyte robes, chairs, coffee maker, organ, or choir music, you see the saints of the church. What else in this church sings out the praises of our saints???

Today we remember our newest saints of the church. We honor their memory by telling stories and remembering them. So today especially, we take the time to thank God for all their lives, for every memory of love and joy, for every good deed done by them and every sorrow shared with us. For all that they have given us to make us what we are, for that of them which lives and grows in each of us, and for their lives that in God's love will never end.

Though our saints have passed from us, their testimonies, life lessons, and strong spirits will never leave us. Today we share the promise of Christ. "Blessed are they who mourn for they shall be comforted." We are given the assurance of God's presence, peace, and love.

God is on a saint search, and it is not only perfect people who are going to be found. Sure, there may be some who are born with the natural ability to love the Lord with the totality of heart, soul, mind and strength, 24/7/365 -- but for most of us, this passion and power comes only after we discover that God has always loved us, and that his love precedes our own.

Fact is, most of us find the Lord only after we have been found by the Lord.

And all he asks is that we respond with that same level of passion ... loving him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength ... and showing a willingness to love our neighbors as ourselves.

If we do, we'll be God's holy ones, set apart for his service. Amen.