



# SAINT MARK'S

## EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*“Almighty God, give us grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you”*

Today's collect sums up the hope and reason why we keep the feast of All Saints'. Today, we remember in particular all the Saints known and unknown who have helped reveal a little more clearly the kingdom of God to the world. We also use this time to remember those who have died. Those saints, those family and friends, who have walked the way before us in our own more particular lives and community.

When we think of saints it's easy to fall into this commonly held misconception that they were these perfect people. They are stuck up in heaven, like they are stuck in our stained glass windows and icons. Blank peaceful expression, serious faces, not moving, not active, maybe even silently judging us. We sing songs of the saints. The saints who are resting from their labor, those patient and brave and true saints, who followed the right, for Jesus sake, the whole of their good lives long. Made strong by God's love, they always knew what to do, never did any wrong. Perfect, perfect Saints. With this kind of view of the Saints it's easy to see why Billy

Joel would rather “laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints.” The conception of Saints as being perfect, doing everything right, creates a chasm between us and them, and that is not what this day is about.

I think Saint Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco, gets closer at approximation of the Saints’ role in the our lives and the life of the world. You see this is church is decorated with gigantic icons of the Saints’, All Saints’, ancient and modern saints, traditional and a not-so-traditional saints, and they are all dancing. Even though the painting is still, you can feel the movement and energy of these dancing, active, laughing, smiling saints. These saints don’t have time to silently judge us they are busy with more important things. The artist was able to capture an essential aspect of the Saints.

The Saints were real people and not perfect by any means. Two saints in particular ones come to mind. Saint Augustine lived a wild and crazy life. He was a broken person, he loved this world and things in this world. He loved them too much and in an unhealthy way. In his thirties, being inspired by Saints before him, he converted to Christianity, God took that brokenness inside of Augustine and used his life to help show others of the love of God. Ignatius of Loyola, was a vain and prideful person. In his own autobiography he said that he was ’a man given over to the vanities of the world, and took a special delight in the exercise of arms, with a great and vain desire of winning glory’. He was so prideful that when he was injured in battle and had to spend months recovering, a family member gave him a book on the lives

of the saints. He read the lives of the saints and thought. I could be one of those people. I could be a saint, and you know what, he did. God used his excessive pride, his biggest weakness and brokenness to draw him into life with him. I don't know of any saints that had it all figured out, who's father and father's father were saints before him, who got top marks, 4.0 in all his miracle classes, who just flew through AP Stigmata. I don't know of any perfect saints.

The saints as we heard in today's reading from Revelation, had to wash their robes for a reason. The Saints' robes did not start out white. The robe was stained with all the messes that come from the great ordeal, that come from living day to day in this messy imperfect life. All the saints had a past that left their robes less than clean. And we all know this. In our own baptismal covenant we are asked the question "Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?" Whenever you fall into sin. It could have just have easily said. "And if you fall into sin" but we as the gathered community we know better than that. In life you will fall down, in a baptized life in Christ you will fall down, but we, as the gathered community, also know that baptism is all about getting back up.

Earlier this week in the office I was thinking and talking a lot about the Saints and how they weren't perfect people and one of the staff members told me about a traditional Japanese theory called Wabi-Sabi. Wabi-sabi is a world view that finds beauty in imperfection. There is a related technique, where when pots or plates get broken they fix that brokenness and imperfection with

gold leaf. Making the broken parts whole, but still honoring the brokenness, renewing and restoring the plate but not getting rid of the imperfections. In a way that is what God is doing to us in baptism, its what the lives of the Saint's show us how to do.

One of my favorite images used by the psalmist is in Psalm 31. Lord I am "as useless as a broken pot." Useless as a broken pot. We have all had those days, when nothing goes rights, were we try or best, or we don't, and everything just seems to go wrong. Lord I am as useless as a broken pot. Believe me the saints had those days too. We are as useless a broken pots, but man, the things that God can do with broken pots. God take those chipped plates, leaky cups and bowls, dull knives, bent forks and spoons, God takes those broken pots to spread the heavenly feast.

The saints are the ones who showed us just how much God can do with broken pots if we let God work through us. But you got to stay open. You have to have a consistent open line to God that you practice regularly. The one thing all the saints have in common in this life is that they prayed, they talked to God, and used that prayer, in whatever form, to listen to how God wanted to shape their lives. And I'm not talking about one off prayers, "Lord help me out of this mess." Those prayers are good and have their place but if you want God to start setting your broken pot on the table you got to start those Day-by-Day-by-Day prayers. Pray when its fruitful and pray when it's dry. Take time to be with God one-to-one. Make it a discipline and make it a priority.

When we pray we, open up the line communication and allow God to begin to shape our lives. When we pray begin to hear more clearly the music and feel the rhythm of that song that has been sung since before creation. When we pray we learn the steps from those who came before and join in on the Dance of the Saints, depicted on the walls of Saint Gregory's, those robed in white who have been through the great ordeal. The dance that started in the mind of God, proceeded through the death and resurrection and continues through the centuries to this moment, to you, so that you can join in now; so you can join in and help show the way to the next generations and generations to come.