

# ALL SAINTS' DAY

“Are You a Sinner or a Saint?”

Our Redeemer Dallas 2020

*So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. Romans 7:21-25*

So, which is it? Are you a sinner or a saint?

“Well,” you might say, “I’m certainly no saint. Now, my grandmother, *she* was a saint. Or my sister-in-law, who has seven children and never seems to raise her voice or lose her temper, *she’s* a saint. But not me. I guess that would make me a sinner.”

And you’re not wrong. As hard as it can be to admit,

## **You are a sinner.**

A sinner is someone who commits sin. Sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4). It’s literally living as if the law did not exist. When Moses was giving his farewell speech to the people of Israel in the book of Deuteronomy, he described sin as “everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes” (12:8). That’s a good way to think about it. Sin is doing whatever you want, *regardless* of what God says in His Word. And since we are by nature sinful and unclean, without the fear of God or trust in God, what *we* want is typically not what *God* wants.

We know from the Ten Commandments that God wants us to fear, love, and trust in Him above all things, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. What *we* want is for all things to fear, love, and trust in *us*, and deep down we are ultimately concerned for *ourselves*, seeking that which will benefit *us* and bring us the most comfort, whether that means passing by those in need, caving in to the culture, speaking ill of our neighbor—the list goes on and on.

And so, we *know* we are sinners. Even when we *want* to do good, sin is there, corrupting our every thought, word, and deed. “Wretched man that I am!” Paul says,

therefore, giving voice to *our* desperate situation, as well, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” You see, although you are a sinner,

### **You are also a saint.**

And by that I don’t mean “a good person.” That’s what *we* typically mean by the word “saint,” but God’s Word means it differently. A saint is a holy one of God, a *forgiven* sinner, not one who *is* good, but one who is covered in the goodness of *Christ*.

In today’s reading from Revelation, John the apostle sees a vision of heaven, with Christ at the center, and a great multitude standing around Him, clothed in white robes. “Who are these?” he asks, being told in reply, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:13-14). They have been covered with the holy, precious blood of Jesus, the blood He shed on the cross for the sins of the world. These people were sinners, too. But they were washed, they were sanctified, they were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:11).

And if you are baptized, if you believe, then you are sanctified, as well. For Paul says that “as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (3:27). You, too, are clothed in the robe Christ’s righteousness that covers all your sin. You are *holy*, not by your *own* works, but by the work of the *Holy Spirit*, who has called you to faith by the Gospel, enlightened you with His gifts, sanctified and kept you in the truth faith, as He does the whole Church on earth and in heaven. When God sees you, now, He sees Jesus, His beloved Son, with whom He is well pleased. So John writes in today’s Epistle, “Beloved, *we* are God’s children now...And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure” (1 Jn. 3:2, 3).

So, which is it? Are you a sinner or a saint? Yes. You are *both*, a sinner *and* a saint, *at the same time*.

But, if that’s true, then, you might also say,

### **“Why don’t I always *feel* like a saint?”**

If I’m so holy, then why don’t I *act* more holy? Why, in the words of St. Paul, do I ‘serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin’? It’s like David says in Psalm 51, ‘my sin is ever before me’ (verse 3). Sometimes, it’s *all* I can see.” This

Paul's struggle, as it is *every* Christian's struggle. Where God sees a saint, we can't help but see the sinner.

And it's discouraging. It's no fun to be poor in spirit, to mourn, or to hunger and thirst for righteousness—and the devil, the world, and our sinful nature prey on that. They tell us, "See? You're no good. Just look at yourself! Look at what you've done! At what you've *failed* to do! A saint? Hardly. All *I* see is a sinner, a failure, a lost cause." They try to lead us into despair, so that our faith in Christ will be shaken. So we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done," asking God to break and hinder every evil plan of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not *want* us to live like saints or believe that we are, and to strengthen and keep us firm in His Word and faith until we die, like He has done with so many others, all the saints we remember today.

So, when the sinner is all that you see, when that accusation is all you can hear, listen to what *God* says. His Word is truth. It cannot be shaken. Your feelings can deceive you: don't trust them. But now thus says the Lord, who created you and formed you, His people: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are Mine" (Isa. 43:1). You may not always *feel* like a saint, but

### **According to God, you are.**

You are holy, because He *says* you are holy. You are loved, because He *says* you are loved. You're forgiven, because He *says* you're forgiven, and *nothing* can change that reality. Nothing can undo what Christ has done for you on the cross and in your Baptism.

That's good news for us who live in a world that is constantly changing. Nothing's like it was six months ago, and that's not even necessarily because of COVID. Things change, they disappoint, they break down, they decay. "All flesh is like grass," Peter reminds us, quoting the prophet Isaiah, "and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever" (1 Peter 1:24-25; Isa. 40:8).

And this word is the good news that Jesus, the one who changes not, abides with you. He has become your Brother. He is with you as Immanuel, sharing in your flesh and blood, that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death (Heb. 2:14). What's more, He is the *firstfruits* of the dead; so, on the Last Day He will raise you and *all* the saints, and give eternal life to you and all believers in Christ, and we will be sinners no more.

Until then, we resist the devil and fight against our sinful nature. With the help of God, we wage *war* against the law of sin that dwells in our members. We do so in the

knowledge that we are saints *as well as* sinners, and that the poor in spirit are *blessed*, for theirs in the kingdom of heaven. So, whether you feel like a saint or not on this All Saints' Day, let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. For,

All around the clouds are breaking;  
Soon the storms of time shall cease;  
In God's likeness we awaken,  
Knowing everlasting peace. (*LSB 671:1*)

*Amen. The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. Who is someone you typically think of as a "saint"?
2. How have you lived as if the law did not exist?
3. What does it *really* mean to be a saint?
4. What if you don't *feel* like a saint?