

# All Saints

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Today's reading from the Book of the Apocalypse gives us St. John's vision of heaven. It is wonderfully encouraging to hear his words, "I saw a huge number, impossible to count, of people from every nation, race, tribe and language." They are the people who have washed their robes white again in the blood of the Lamb. We know that this is our calling as Christians. We were washed in the Blood of the Lamb on the day of our baptism. Our foreheads were sealed with the cross, and the holy oils of catechumens and chrism. We belong to Christ. His power protects us from all evil. Provided we remain faithful, we are destined to be counted among the saints.

An official book called the Roman Martyrology contains thousands of saints listed day by day. In recent centuries the process of canonisation, or declaring someone to be a saint, has been reserved to the Pope. This was to prevent too easy, and too hasty, local canonisations. There was a danger that insufficient scrutiny might allow serious faults to become known later, or for unworthy motives to prevail, a desire for a local saint to rival a nearby town or village. This is why today there are three stages. The first involves an examination of the life of the saint, and their writings. Today this is done in the diocese where the person died, and then sent to Rome for scrutiny. Once someone's holiness of life has been established in this way, he or she may be called Venerable. After this, the Church looks to God to provide confirmation in the form of miraculous response to prayer. Formerly two, now one miracle is required for the next stage of beatification, and the final stage of canonisation. Canonisation means that someone is solemnly proclaimed a saint, and held up as an example, and someone who may be honoured publicly in Church. However, for every canonised saint, there are countless others, who lived holy lives, but are known only to a few, or whose memory has been forgotten. Today we honour all these, and ask their prayers as we endeavour to follow their example.

Why do we do this? Isn't it enough to pray to Jesus, our high priest? Of course, in one sense it is. What could be more effective than the prayer of Christ? However, this ignores the fact that we are all members of the Body of Christ – this is what we call the Communion of Saints. We support each other by our prayers and example. This does not cease with death. Instead, we gain friends in heaven to pray for us. Those who are being purified by God's love in Purgatory can no longer help themselves, but they can continue to pray for us. Only God can know who is already in heaven, and only he can make this known to us through miracles. This is why the Church combines All Saints with the Commemoration of All Souls. Just as we ask the help of the saints in heaven, so too we must help the Holy Souls by our prayers, sacrifices and acts of charity. It is one of the works of mercy alongside burying the dead.