1. What is a Saint?

All Saints’ Day is coming soon, on November 1st. Right now, our church is dressed in green, but when we go to church for All Saints’ Day, it will be dressed in white. When the church is all white, it’s because we’re celebrating something very special. On All Saints’ Day, we celebrate the saints and thank God for them. Who are some saints that you remember? Do you know what a saint is?

A saint is a ‘holy one.’ Even though the word ‘holy’ is only four letters, it is a very big word. In heaven, we know that God’s angels are always singing “Holy, Holy, Holy” to God; we sing with these words on Sunday as we prepare for the bread and the wine.

God is holy and saints are holy – how are they the same? To be holy means to be ‘set apart.’ What does that make you think of? Things that are ‘set apart’ are special. What are special things in your house? Plates that you use only on Christmas? A book that belonged to your great-great-great grandpa? Something that is set apart is not something to be used at any old time. It’s different.

Saints are different, too. They are special, set apart, because they welcomed goodness into their heart. They said, “Yes, please come in, to love and righteousness” which means, really, that they said, “Yes, please come in” to Jesus Himself. And by saying that “yes” over and over again, they became different. They lost some of the wrongness of our old world, and they became more whole, more ‘holy.’

That’s the root of holiness – wholeness. One of the church fathers said, “the glory of God is man fully alive.” The saints are people that are fully alive, that have so much life in them that they are brave even in the face of death.
2. Lots of Different Saints

The saints aren’t just different than those who say “no” to God in the world; they are also very different from each other. When we say “yes” again and again, we become more like Jesus, and we also become more like ourselves.

God made you to be something for him that no one else is. He made you to do something for him that no one else can do. The saints show us that there is not just one way to please God. We know that God wants us to love Him and love people, but the ways that we each live that out can look very different.

- Some saints lived all by themselves in lonely places so that they could pray, like Saint Anthony who lived in the desert.
- Some saints lived in crowded cities where they could help poor people, like Mother Teresa.
- Some saints were married and became fathers and mothers, like Joseph and Mary. Some saints were not, like St. Luke, St. Agnes and Agatha.
- Some saints travelled across oceans to tell other people about Jesus, like St. Paul and St. Patrick. But others stayed near their home, to be faithful in one place.
- Some were noble, like King Aelfred the Great. Some gave everything away to be poor, like St. Francis of Assisi.
- Some saints were monks or nuns or priests or bishops, like St. Benedict, St. Hildegard, and St. Nicholas.
- Some saints were younger, like St. Joan who led an army at 16. Some saints were older, like St. Theodore called to be archbishop of Canterbury at age 66.
- Some saints were learned, like St. Augustine and St. Jerome. Some saints were not, like the fishermen apostles, St. Peter and St. John.

All these saints were different than each other, but alike in that what they wanted most was Jesus. It’s such good news that God doesn’t want us to be exactly like each other! When we look around the world, we see so many beautiful things that are so different from each other – zebras and mice, lions and lambs, fish and dogs, trees and fungus. It’s no wonder that it makes God happy to see the many different ways His people follow after Him.
3. How to Be a Saint

We don’t know all the saints of God. Some are hidden; the secret, good things they did for God have never been noticed by people, though we know they are noticed by God and treasured by Him. Other saints have been noticed by the Church for years and years as people that we can try to be like. But did you know that you are also a ‘saint?’ Saint Paul calls all Christians, all people who love Jesus and obey His words, saints.

When we say the creed together on Sunday, we say, “I believe in one, holy, Catholic and apostolic church, the communion of saints….” and so on. The communion of saints is something very special to think about. It means that it’s not just those sitting next to us on the pew who are our brothers and sisters. It’s not even just our friends who are across from us on the aisle. It’s all those who have followed Jesus, all His saints, dead and alive, who are our brothers and sisters. And, we together are one family. We are knit together in our praise of God. We are One as we take the bread and the wine every Sunday. We are all saints.

Most of the time I don’t feel very much like a saint – do you? But it makes me happy to remember what Jesus said was the first step to being a saint – to be “poor in spirit.” What do you think that means? To be poor means that you don’t have lots of stuff. To be poor in spirit is to realize you don’t have lots of good in your heart on your own. It means to know that you’re not rich in love and goodness without Jesus. He said that the “poor in spirit” are blessed – theirs’ is the kingdom of heaven!

To be blessed is to be happy. This happiness may not be something you feel right away, but it’s stronger and sturdier than a house or a rock because it’s a happiness that comes from following Jesus. Here are some of Jesus’s other words on how to be a happy, and really, how to be a saint, like our brothers and sisters who are already with Jesus.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
34. Welcoming the Saints

Why would someone be killed because they love Jesus? Ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, our world has been wrong. It’s been crooked, missing parts, full of ugly things like meanness, anger, people hurting other people, people caring only about themselves, things that lead to death. We see these ugly things all around us. And we see them in ourselves.

Sometimes, when other people do what is right while we are doing what is wrong, it doesn’t make us glad. It makes us angry. Do you remember Cain and Abel, Adam and Eve’s sons? When Abel made an offering that pleased God, Cain didn’t say to himself, “I should learn from Abel and do what I now see is right, what God wants.” No, instead, he became angry. He killed Abel because Abel was good and showed Cain the right way. Abel was the first saint killed because of His offering to God.

When you see someone do right and it makes you feel uncomfortable, you have two choices --- the two choices people have always had when they met a saint: to close the door of your heart and let anger and uncomfortableness with goodness build up in your heart, or, to welcome goodness, to say, “I don’t understand this, and it makes me feel strange, but I want what is good. And I want to know more.”

On All Saints’ Day, we welcome the saints into our church, into our homes and families, and into our hearts. We say, “I may not understand you, but I want to know more.”
5. Death and the Saints

Sometimes, it’s not easy to want to be a saint. Being a saint seems to have a lot to do with death. And death is scary. No one wants to die. God didn’t make us to die. We die because of sin—because of the wrongness in the world and in us.

When God saved the world, He knew He couldn’t ignore death. If He was going to take care of the wrongness of sin, He would have to go straight at Death, our enemy.

Jesus’s life went straight at Death like an arrow. When He hung on the cross and died, Death thought he had won. But Jesus is Life Himself. All the Death in the world couldn’t keep Him in his grave. And now He is alive, and His saints surround Him around His throne.

His saints also looked at Death and said, “Even if I die, you can’t beat me because I belong to Life.” St. John said that the saints “loved not their lives so much as to shrink from death.” And many saints died in horrible ways, still with their love for Jesus in their hearts and on their lips. Some of them didn’t meet their deaths in such awful ways. But that doesn’t mean that they “shrank from Death.”

Everyone who follows Jesus gets to know death better and better before we actually die. Jesus tells us that we are to each take up our cross and die daily. When we say “no” to the wrong things, in a way we don’t quite understand, we die. Something that is bad in us dies and makes more room for goodness, for more of Jesus. St. Paul said, “I am crucified with Christ, therefore I no longer live. Jesus Christ now lives in me.”

Each day, we must die to the parts of ourselves that want what is bad and live to Jesus. Each day, we believe that by not shrinking from Death in these little things, we make more room for Life, for happiness or blessedness, for Jesus Himself.
6. Dealing with Scary Things and Halloween

We start celebrating every major feast day on the evening before. So, we have Christmas Eve and Holy Saturday and, believe it or not, Halloween! Halloween is a word that shortens All Hallow’s Eve. “Hallows” is another word for Saints.

Now, on Halloween, sometimes people dress up as scary things, or put them out in their yards - ghosts, zombies, skeletons, and lots more things that you don’t want to remember as you’re going to sleep at night.

While we don’t think it’s a good idea to celebrate Halloween with those kinds of costumes and decorations, because we are Christians, we can know how to think about them.

Everyone has to deal with the things that they are afraid of. And in some ways, bringing out those scary things is a way of dealing with them, of bringing them out into the open, rather than always hiding them in the dark.

The great thing is that when we see these scary, ugly things brought into the open, we can remember that Jesus has beaten them. He has triumphed over all the scary, ugly things in this world. He has won. And he tells us, “Do not fear.”

So, tonight, as we go out and as we welcome people into the light of our front porch, we do this as those who belong to Jesus. We can laugh and have fun tonight because Jesus has won over all the scary, and ugly things. And, we are happy because we remember that tomorrow, we will celebrate those who have won along with Him: His Saints.
7. Today is the Day

Today it is All Saints Day! Today, we thank God for His saints, for all those who have kept saying ‘no’ to the wrongness of this world and have kept saying, “Yes, please come in” to Jesus. This is not just a day for grown-ups. This is a day for you, too.

You may think that to be a saint, you have to be big and do big things for God. This is not true. You need to do the same things that all of us followers of Christ are trying to do – whether we are old or young, big or small. We are trying to “do small things with great love.”

That is what Mother Teresa, a saint who worked with the poorest people you can think of in Calcutta, India, told us to do. She also said, “If you want to change the world, go home and love your family.” When we love each other, when we share and serve and honor one another, we change the world. We live like saints, even in our family, in our home.

Jesus also told his grown-up followers, that they needed to change and become like little children, like you, in order to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3). Jesus knows your heart. He knows that you want to follow Him and do what is right. He knows that even if you don’t do what is right all the time, it doesn’t make you happy. He knows that even if you don’t understand everything, you want to be a saint.

He wants to help you, through His Holy Spirit, through His Church, through His Word, to be a saint. Let’s pray together and ask Him to help us:

“Almighty God, you are worthy of your saints, of all your followers who have lived and died for you since the world began. Help us to live like saints. Help us to do small things with great love. Help us to say “yes” over and over again to You. Help us to not fear, but to be a family full of your light and love. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.”