

**“For All the Saints”**  
**1 Corinthians 1:1-2**  
**11.07.21**

**Introduction**

Like most special days in the life of the Church, we “get” *All Saints Day*...for the most part, at least. However, there are some aspects that we ignore, forsake, or simply do not know. We do this with Advent and Lent, but it also happens with the best-known festivals like Christmas and Easter, too.

When it comes to All Saints Day, we typically think of those who have gone on before us. Especially those who have passed in the last year—and that is certainly appropriate. However, it is called *All Saints Sunday* because we celebrate “all saints,” both in heaven and on earth.

Typically, when I think of saints I think of people like St. Paul, St. Peter, or more recently, Mother Theresa. However, as we read in our Scripture lesson today, every person who calls Jesus “Lord,” is a saint.

I know when I wake up in the morning and look in the mirror, the first thing I think is not “saint.” In fact, I see a broken human being who is a work in progress who is making it one day at a time. Perhaps that sounds a bit harsh, but my engagement with Scripture and Christian teaching leads me to believe that that is a pretty accurate definition of a saint.

Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation, claimed that as Christians, we are both sinners and saints. We understand what it means to be a sinner pretty well. My definition of sinning is when we hurt God, hurt others, and hurt ourselves. That sort of behavior comes to us naturally. But the idea that we are simultaneously a saint is a little intimidating, or maybe just sounds ridiculous.

**“Moving on to Perfection”**

Paul addresses the Corinthians as “saints” and as those who are “sanctified in Christ.” If you read far enough into his letter to the Corinthians, you will realize that calling them saints certainly sounds ridiculous. The Corinthians are divisive, they have power struggles, and inflated egos. The word “saint” hardly seems to apply.

Paul uses the words “saint” and “sanctified,” which are cognates, and these ideas appear frequently in his writings. Sanctification is also something that occupied much of John Wesley’s teaching.

Wesley taught that when we acknowledge our sins and accept Christ as our savior, we receive God’s justifying grace. But God continues giving us sanctifying grace throughout the rest of our lives so that we can become holy.

According to Wesley, the “means of grace” are prayer, reading Scripture, Holy Communion, and growing together with other Christians by participating in small groups. It is through these practices that we regularly access God’s sanctifying grace. It is through these practices that we grow as saints on this side of heaven.

Another way John Wesley framed this conversation was by talking about Christian Perfection—another expression that sounds a bit intimidating at first glance. John Wesley did not mean that we would ever become perfect in the sense that we would stop sinning altogether; instead, for Wesley, Christian Perfection is when our greatest desire is to love God with all of our hearts and love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

When our lives are driven by these two expressions of love, our first instinct when we sin is to ask God and our neighbor for forgiveness. We are perfected by love, will be more sensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and we will do anything necessary to maintain that close relationship with God.

## **Preplanning Your Funeral**

Recently I saw a t-shirt that said, “Live in such a way that the preacher doesn’t have to lie at your funeral.” That’s pretty good advice!

Typically, on All Saints Day, we enter the sanctuary and see the banners with the names of all those who have gone to heaven. The banners remind us of conversations, moments serving with the departed, and worshipping together. Perhaps we attended some of their funerals and celebrated their lives knowing that the preacher didn’t have to lie. They were saints on earth and now they are saints in heaven.

Maybe our sisters and brothers in Christ who are now in glory did not know how to articulate John Wesley’s teaching on perfect love, but they knew how to embody it. They modeled it for us, and their lives continue to speak to us. We call this their testimony or their witness.

## **Our Testimony**

Our testimony is simply the way that we share our faith story both through our words and through our actions. Our testimony is the way we explain how we became a Christian and how we have continued to grow in grace on the journey.

This week I want to give you a concrete challenge. I hope you will sit down with a piece of paper and pen and write down your testimony. I’m not really talking about when you became a church member or how long you have been a member. And I’m also not talking about the kind of jobs or offices you have held in the church.

When I get to heaven and stand before God, I do not expect God to spend too much time focusing on the fact that I was a pastor. Instead, I expect for God to focus on how I

responded to the grace that I received and how I grew over time in my walk with the Lord.

So, here are some questions to think about: Are you growing in grace? Are you being sanctified in Christ Jesus? Are you practicing the means of grace to help you live a holy life? In the words of John Wesley, are you “moving on to perfection?”

If you don't know how to share your testimony, or where to start, I hope you will tune in next week to hear Sheila Radochio share her faith story. If we are going to be saints who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, we need to live our faith, but we also need to be able to share it, both in this life and in the life to come.

### **Reference Tools**

Wesley, John. *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*.

### **Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

1. Who comes to mind when you think of a “saint”?
2. As you reflect on this week's message, what one thought stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?
3. What does it look like for you to respond to God's sanctifying grace? Which of the means of grace helps you grow the most in your relationship with God?
4. Are you able to share your testimony? If not, is it something you are willing to work toward?
5. How have you witnessed God recently in your life?
6. How can we pray for you?