

Are all Christians saints? When do we, Christians, become saints? After Baptism? Or, as most people tend to think, after death? That is because, according to liturgical calendar, the Christian church celebrates saint's days for those who have become historical figures. No church celebrates a saint's day while the person is still alive! Furthermore, the majority of saints the church commemorates became martyrs. I suspect, for this very reason, many Christians dislike to be called saints while living on earth.

On this year's All Saints' Day, however, I would invite you to consider this question: How should we live as saints here and now?

So can't we be called saints before we encounter death? Is it arrogant to claim such status while living? The appointed readings for All Saints' Day are quite revealing. The Epistle reading is 1 John 3.1-3 whereas the chosen Gospel reading is the Beatitude of the Sermon on the Mount. Of course, the word 'saints' does not occur in either passage. But who are *'the blessed'* mentioned in the Beatitude? Can we not substitute the word 'saints' instead? Would the meaning of the Beatitude change in any sense? Likewise, if we change the words 'children of God' in 1 John 3.1-3 into 'saints' would the passage lose its wonderful meaning? Are not saints supposed to see God when they pass away? Are not saints' main striving in life to sanctify themselves for this very purpose? Otherwise they will not be able to see God face to face.

*"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."* But we are told by the prophet Jeremiah, *"The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse— who can understand it?"* We face a dilemma! Human beings are born with devious and perverse heart. How to make our hearts pure? Can we do it ourselves?

In the mid-80's, the Hong Kong South China Morning Post Sunday magazine, in one of its editions, had this rather eye-catching words on its front page: "Man May Live Forever!" It was a quote from an interview with the famous Australian heart surgeon Dr Victor Chang who happened to be in Hong Kong at the time. In the course of the interview, Dr Chang was describing quite an idealistic future, very much like a scientific fiction. We all know that Dr Chang was at the time doing research of a synthetic human heart. He was saying it might come to a time in the future that, whatever and whenever a human organ fails, it can be replaced by a fault-free synthetic one. Hence human life can live for a very long time. Of course, Dr Chang believed human life has a very optimistic outlook because he predicted medical technology will continue to improve forever.

Even if we have a perfect heart as predicted by Dr Chang, does it mean that our hearts are pure in the sight of God and that human beings can live death-free?

The Epistle and Gospel readings for All Saints' Days are quite interesting. Both passages we may say are penned in idealistic language. In fact 1 John Ch 3 is the best illustration of perfectionist language in the New Testament. Whereas the Beatitude presents the perfect world the Blessed live in. In other words, saints according to New Testament understanding live in two worlds - the present world and the world to come, or if you like, the imperfect, sinful world and the perfect world. Only saints know this reality. *'See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.'* In other words, in this imperfect world, only saints recognize God. Why does the world not recognize Him? Because secular folks delight in the pleasures of their own hearts. When the Lord Jesus himself walked on earth, God was in flesh, people did not recognize him. If they had recognized him, they would not have crucified him!

Notice the word *'Now'* in verse 2: *Beloved, we are God's children now.'* This status of being children of God is not merely a name but a present reality of the world to come. When and how do we become children of God? Of course, when we are baptized, we receive the heavenly voice as Jesus did in his baptism, *'You are my beloved.'* The author of 1 John indicates to us it is the Father's 'gift of love', the adoption of humankind to become God's children, the end-time transformation declared in its most simple form. If you like, in a metaphorical sense, baptism is the heart surgery; our devious and perverse hearts have been replaced by purified hearts.

So the saints know that they have received a new and pure heart. Without a pure heart, no-one can ever see God face to face. This is the condition of any person to be a saint. Sadly the world does not recognize it.

Although we now recognize God and know that we are children of God, the reality is that we are still living and mixing with secular folks in the world. The present end-time reality still awaits full disclosure. 1 John 3:2 says, *'it does not yet appear what we shall be.'* What we shall be is not something totally different from what we are now. Though the future disclosure, its content is hidden, there is a continuity of life and status between the now and then. Because Christian life is none other than life in Christ. Saints are living in the mode of "Christ existence", yet not fully clear

to us. Once again it is because by baptism we are given the privilege to participate in the mode of Christ existence here and now.

So how shall saints live here and now? We live in hope of that final disclosure. Which means Christian life on earth is one of self-purification, '*as he is pure*', that is a disciplined and serious laying-hold of that mode of existence which is Christ already.

The mode of Christ existence requires further exploration. '*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*' What is that Word? He '*who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.*' That is how saints see Christ's mode of existence. He is in the form of God, the Word of God, one with the Father, equal to the Father; but sadly the world, secular folks cannot see this mode of Christ's existence. What they see is the Word made flesh, but they see the form of a servant, justified to be put to death, not the form of God. In other words, secular folks have not had their hearts transformed. '*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*'

Why should we live as saints here and now? There is a reward. *We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*' The apostle John can write these words by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The meaning of it every reader, including ourselves, can only ponder in heart. Since as yet we cannot see, our purpose of living must lie in longing. The whole life of a saint is a holy longing. As St Augustine says, 'What you long for, as yet do not see; but longing makes in you the room which shall be filled, when that which you are to see shall come.'

Dear saints let us long, because we are to be filled. Let us follow St Paul's footstep and see how he was being filled: *Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.*' We may ask St Paul: What then is your business in this life, if you have made it your own? He answers: *One thing: forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching out to the things that are before, according to my purpose I follow after the prize of the upward calling.*'

May we follow St Paul's good example. Let us stretch ourselves out toward him, that when he comes he may fill us full. For we shall be like him; because we shall see him as he is.