

Saints and Fathers

Hebrews 12:22-24

Perhaps the question arises as to why so much emphasis is placed on the saints or why so much prominence is given to the church fathers? The answer is found in the orthodox belief in the nature of the church.

The saints and the fathers are the conscience of the "ecclesia" (the assembly of the faithful) because they were the living flame of the Holy Spirit. They were people who experienced the presence of Christ in a special way in their lives and became witnesses for Christ to the world. As a result of their devotion to Christ, many of them were martyred. The blood they shed for the faith, the oral and written word they proclaimed, the hymns and the services they wrote, have made them ever-present in the faith and life of the Church.

The saints and church fathers were chosen by God to be used in a special way. They purified the faith from heretical influences and defined all the major doctrines of Christianity, such as the Holy Trinity, the nature of Christ, the person of the Holy Spirit, the nature of the Church, and the function of her sacraments. They supported the Church and strengthened the faith.

The Scriptures tell us of a number of ways that these brothers and sisters in Christ continue to help us by example and by praying for us, by joining their prayers to the Lord with our own. (Isaiah 51:1-2) The saints are sometimes sent by God to minister to us in a particular need. (Matthew 27:53)



Some of them were simple folk, others were theologians and clergymen, still others were wise men and scholars, while there are even kings and socially prominent people who considered "the sufferings of this present time not worthy compared with the glory that is to be revealed . . ." (Romans 8:18)

The Armenian Church not only honors the saints and fathers but also encourages us to imitate their example of dedication and devotion to Christ and his bride, the church.

We Are Saints

In the New Testament every Christian is a saint, for we have all been made holy in the blood of Christ (I Corinthians 6:11; Philipians 1:1); yet we are also called to grow into the fullness of that holiness. (I Corinthians 1:2; I Thessalonians 4:1-3)

Even though Christians are spread out all over the world, we are in “assembly.” We are the assembly of God’s firstborn, since in God’s family each and every one of us has been given the privileged and honored position of being the firstborn child! This we have when we allow Christ to live in us and become one in him who is God’s firstborn. (Hebrews 1:6)

We have one Father, one Lord Jesus Christ, one Spirit who has been given to us all, one faith, one hope that we are all enrolled in heaven, one baptism, and peace with God and with one another. (Ephesians 2:14) We are also one, and yet so diverse in our giftedness. (I Corinthians 12:4-27) We are joined together in suffering, in our sharing in the sufferings of Christ. (I Peter 5:9; Philipians 3:10) These sufferings, our rejection by the world because we try to live the Gospel, when borne with love and patience and in union with Jesus, are a very powerful channel of blessing for the church and for the salvation of the world. (Colossians 1:24) Even as we work to bring healing and to alleviate suffering, we need to remember that by our wounds, borne with our Lord, many will be healed and brought to salvation (I Peter 2:21-25) to experience the peace and joy that passes all understanding.

We are one in prayer. St. Paul reminds us to pray for all the saints (Ephesians 6:18; James 5:16), especially for those in positions of leadership (I Timothy 2:1-4)

and for those given a special ministry of preaching the Gospel. (Ephesians 6:19-20) We also pray for our departed loved ones. The communion of saints on earth should be primarily a communion of love, where the community of believers is “of one heart and one mind” (Acts 4:32), where we love one another constantly (I Peter 1:22) as Jesus has loved us. (John 15:12; I John 3:16) If one member suffers, all the members suffer with him; if one member is honored, all the members share his joy. (I Corinthians 12:26) This communion of love is expressed in a special way in our Divine Liturgy.

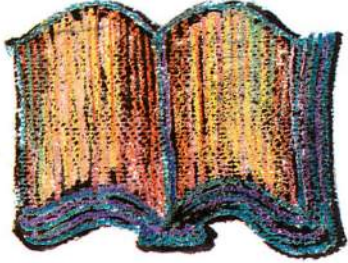
Conclusion

As we become better acquainted with God’s family, the communion of saints, to which we belong, we begin to realize that we are “strangers and aliens no longer,” but rather “fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God.” (Ephesians 2:19) Wherever we go, we do not meet strangers but we meet our brothers and sisters, we meet members of our own family. And when we as a family begin to reach out in love to the poor and suffering of the world, to the multitudes who do not know Jesus, we extend the love of the family to embrace the whole world and in this way join with our Lord in gathering “into one all the dispersed children of God.” (John 11:52)



At-Home-Work

I *JOURNAL ENTRY.* Read "Saints" and respond to questions.



II *Bible readings for the week to share with your family:*

Monday

Hebrews 12:22-24, Isaiah 51:1-2, Matthew 27:52-53, Romans 8:18, I Corinthians 6:11

Tuesday

Philippians 1:1, I Corinthians 1:2, I Thessalonians 4:1-3, Hebrews 1:6, Ephesians 2:14

Wednesday

I Corinthians 12:4-27, I Peter 5:9, Philipians 3:10, Colossians 1:24, I Peter 2:21-25

Thursday

John 15:11, Acts 13:52, Acts 15:3, Romans 14:17, Romans 15:13, Ephesians 6:18

Friday

James 5:16, I Timothy 2:1-4, Ephesians 6:19-20, Acts 4:32, I Peter 1:22

Saturday

John 15:12, I John 3:16, I Corinthians 12:26, Ephesians 2:19, John 11:52

III *Read and study next week's lesson.*

Saints

A little girl sat for the first time in a church with a beautiful stained-glass window. She was as quiet as a mouse in awe of her surroundings. She whispered her question about the lovely window and was told it was a saint. She was happy and content to know what a saint was.

A few days later, she was crossing the park with a friend when they saw an aged woman with flowers and a full basket of groceries on her way to the poorer neighborhood in the town.

"There goes a saint if there ever was one," said the friend. The little girl was puzzled. On Sunday a saint was a beautiful stained-glass window, and now it was an old woman. How could that be?

Then a smile covered her little face. "I know," she said, "a saint is someone who lets the light shine through."

Paraphrase what the little girl said to define what a saint is:

Sanctification

How can the living Christ change a person's face from an angry, hard-lined one to a face like a cathedral window lighted up at eventide?
