

Called to Be Saints

Is being a Christian less than being a saint or are they the same thing?

As the Church began to grow through efforts of the apostles and early leaders it became a common practice to refer to the members of the believing community as saints. The word has a special meaning applicable to all Christians.

Read together from the letter of St. Paul to the Romans 1:1–7. What do you say about the saints?

Read also the following Old Testament passages and in your own words describe the qualities and deeds of the saints: Psalm 16:3; Psalm 30:4; Psalm 97:10; Psalm 116:15.



Compare these descriptions:

Mother Theresa, a religious leader who lives in India, has spent her entire life caring for the hungry, sick, and dying people of that country. She has been able to solicit adequate financial assistance from many social and religious agencies in the world to help provide the care needed by these unfortunate persons. Her charisma has attracted a multitude of volunteers who have aided her in her ministry. She has always been extolled and complimented for her work, and has answered: "It is not me, but Christ in me that makes this all happen."

St. John of Otzoon, a spiritual shepherd of the Armenian Church, served as Catholicos from 717 to 728. His pontificate was during a turbulent time of oppression by the Arab overlords. Through his efforts and charismatic ways he developed a trusting relationship with the Moslem Emir and succeeded in securing religious freedom of worship and special status for the clergy and church properties. In 718 A.D., he convened a council in Dvin where a systematic structure of church canon law was devised. He fought against many groups who refused to be obedient to the faith of Christ's Church by writing essays defining clearly the truth as taught by Christ. He wrote many prayers and hymns. He was universally proclaimed a saint by our church in the 18th century.

How did both Mother Theresa and St. John of Otzoon respond to certain authorities to achieve the results of their requests?

The Saints and Prayer

After looking through the litanies in our Divine Liturgy book on pages 2a, 32a, 33a, 35a, list the saints we remember and beseech to intercede for us.



Let Us Become Like God — Asdvadzatsoom

There is hardly a person who lives on this earth that has not asked the question, "Why am I here?"

The answer is simple: We live on earth in order to live in heaven, in order to be "divinized," in order to *become one with God*. This process is called "deification." In Armenian we say *Asdvadzatsoom*.

This showing of God through our lives is indeed a saintly virtue which can truly name one as *saint*.

Read together from the author of the teaching of "deification," St. Athanasius.

As, then, he who desires to see God who by nature is invisible and not to be beheld, may yet perceive and know him through his works, so too let him who does not see Christ with his understanding at least consider him in his bodily works and test whether they be of man or God. If they be of man, then let him scoff; but if they be of God, let him not mock at things which are no fit subject for scorn, but rather let him recognize the fact and marvel that things divine have been revealed to us by such humble means, that through death deathlessness has been made known to us, and through the Incarnation of the Word the Mind whence all things proceed has been declared, and its Agent and Ordainer, the Word of God himself. *He, indeed, assumed humanity that we might become God. He manifested himself by means*

of a body in order that we might perceive the Mind of the unseen Father. He endured shame from men that we might inherit immortality. He himself was unhurt by this, for he is impassible and incorruptible; but by his own impassibility he kept and healed the suffering men on whose account he thus endured. In short, such and so many are the Savior's achievements that follow from his Incarnation. (*On the Incarnation of the Word, 54*)

Now that we know what we are (human) and whom we reflect (God), we can better understand the Church's teachings on saints.

How can we become partakers of the divine nature — "become God?"

What deeds and actions can each of us do to impart saintly qualities?

How does the church perpetuate the memories of great keepers of the faith "called to be saints?"



Unit V: Special People of the Church _____

Session 1—Called to Be Saints

Key Concepts

1. Individual sainthood as defined by St. Paul is an attribute and characteristic inherent in each member of the believing community.
2. The church acclaims specially chosen people (saints) as models of faith, recognizing that God's mystical power shines throughout their lives.
3. The intercession of saints means asking them to pray to God for us.
4. In sainthood, God's divinity and omnipotent power are made manifest.

Objectives

Students will

1. Read Saint Paul's definition of the term *saint*.
2. Define the difference between saintliness (possessing the quality of God's glory), and sainthood (manifesting God's glory).
3. Give explicit examples of how individual saintliness is proclaimed as universal sainthood.
4. Read the definition of Saint Athanasius on the purpose of the Incarnation and explain in their own terms the process of deification.
5. Define the term, intercession.
6. Give examples of how the Christian community keeps alive the memory and spirit of universal sainthood.

Background for Teacher

Sainthood is a human quality that enables the glory of God to shine forth. Every soul who "puts on Christ" at baptism is considered a saint in that he or she can manifest the holiness and power of our Almighty Creator through the deeds, work, and faith expressed in their lives. It should be remembered, however, that the virtues of sainthood and saintliness are not confined to the New Testament. Even in the Old Testament, Scripture reference is made to the chosen people of God (Israel) as "saints." (Psalms 16:3, 30:4, 97:10, 116:15)

This special quality of holiness goes beyond any words which try to define the word, saint. A saint is the image of God himself; a saint is a person who willingly partakes of God's divine nature and makes it part of his human nature. A saint is one who is like God and possesses godly qualities (*Asdvadzahman*). It is no surprise then that the Armenian word for holy and saint is the same: for in both, holiness and saintliness, these God-like virtues are present.

Since the inception of the Church, certain individuals from among the believers have been acclaimed by the church community to be genuine models of a life through which the mystical glory and power of God was made present. These were people of all ages, both men and women, who used their "gifts" of the Holy Spirit, their human powers and wisdom to lead, nurture, and encourage the entire believing community.

The Church, believing that they indeed reflected a God-like image, elevated such persons and truly believed that they had found favor with God and enjoyed his presence in heaven. As an act of such faith, the church developed the theology of *intercession of saints*. This meant that with their prayer as well as our own, God hears our petitions all the better. The saints live with Christ; their souls have the ability to pray to God on our behalf as much as we ourselves can pray. They are the "church triumphant"; we are the "church militant."

The first among the universally proclaimed saints in the entire Christian Church is the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ, Mother of God, *Asdvadzadzin*. It is through her that salvation came into the world in Jesus Christ. To honor this position, her icon is canonically prescribed to be placed on the altars of our churches as a reminder to us of her greatness as a saint, and of our potential greatness as saints of the church.

Materials Needed

- Divine Liturgy books (one for each student, or every two students)
- Bibles

Procedure

1. Opening prayer: Let us make the Holy Mother of God and all the saints intercessors with the Father in heaven, that he may be pleased to have mercy and compassion and save his creatures. Almighty Lord, our God, save us and have mercy. (1 min.)
2. Read together text introduction and then Romans 1:1-7 with the students and ask them: a) what we, "who are called to be saints," like St. Paul, can receive, and b) what this should bring about.

(Key verse is 5: receive grace and apostleship to bring about obedience of faith.)

Also read from the Old Testament: Psalms 16:3—sainthood is noble; 30:4—saints praise the Lord; 97:10—saints hate evil; 116:15—saints are honored even after death.

Discuss briefly with the students what obedience

of faith is, asking them to give examples.

(Suggested answers: Teaching the faith; living out the faith; preaching; charitable deeds; devising means to show God's glory and reveal his message; performing divine acts for healing through prayer and worship.) (14 min.)

3. Review with students the two short descriptions of Saint John of Otzoon and Mother Theresa. Ask them to classify each description into the category of sainthood or saintliness. Lead the discussion, helping them to identify:

- Sainthood—As the status we all hope to achieve as Christians; that through our lives and deeds God's divine nature and glory is finally revealed.

- Saintliness—As possessing God-like qualities while we are still alive on earth.

Have them list persons they know who have these qualities and tie this to the scriptural passage from Romans 1:5 on "obedience of faith." (15 min.)

4. Provide them with the explanation of the word, "intercessor," meaning one who asks on our behalf. Have them give examples of persons they know who are intercessors. (10 min.)

5. Look at the litanies in the Divine Liturgy book on pages 2a, 32a, 33a, 35a, and explain that this is how the Church remembers such great people and ask them to pray for us. Have them list the saints we remember during the badarak. (10 min.)

6. Review the terms: Incarnation (Asdvadzahaydnootiun); Deification (Asdvadzatzoom; partaking of God's divine nature and becoming like God).

Read together the teaching of St. Athanasius on the Incarnation and Deification on page 65. Let the students discuss these theological concepts in reference to their own lives, their own experiences of God, and the communities' witness to the saints.

Questions: How can we as Christians be partakers of the divine nature? (Romans 1:5) What deeds and actions can each of us perform to impart saintly qualities? How does the church perpetuate the memories of great keepers of the faith? (10 min.)

Homework: Have the students prepare for next week's session by reading the biographies of the Cappadocian Fathers, in the next lesson.

Session 2—The Cappadocian Fathers

Key Concepts

1. Men who were teachers in the church are known as Fathers, but there were women teachers as well.
2. The Fathers of the Church carried out their ministry to the believing community in defining the mysteries

of God, clarifying the obscure and often austere nature of his divine power, and preserving the orthodoxy of faith.

3. The Cappadocian Fathers laid the foundations for the growing faith communities in Christ.

4. The Armenian Church community recognizes the universal sainthood of the Cappadocian Fathers.

Objectives

Students will

1. Define the term "Fathers."
2. List the duties of the Fathers of the church.
3. Examine the Divine Liturgy to see how the believing community remembers these great Fathers.
4. Explain and give examples of how these Fathers have helped develop specific theological teachings of our Church.

Background for Teacher

The concepts of fatherhood and motherhood imply definite attributes and responsibilities. Our total existence is dependent upon a father and mother, because it is from them both that we are given life. Fathers and mothers can be seen as "givers" of life, providers, creators, teachers, guardians, founders, nourishers, guides.

With regard to our faith development, both parents are essential to help our faith mature. In terms of the father-mother relationship, we understand that God is "Our Father" and his Holy Church is "Our Mother." He lives and truly exists through the church which is the visible organism of his birth and mysterious existence.

Throughout the historical development of the Church many individuals, both male and female, have participated in the divine mission of the apostles as teachers, instructors and guides. Even in Old Testament literature we read of the great prophets, male and female, who foretold of the great coming of our Lord.

As the Church, the believing community, grew, she was led and guided by wise men who were given the title "Father," according to St. Paul who states in his first epistle to the Corinthians (4:15): "For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have given you birth through the Gospel." St. Paul saw himself as "father" and implies here that the father is generator of life and that by the Gospel in the Mother Church, birth is given to that life.

From Saint Paul's time, the Church has been blessed by great men called Fathers who were teachers, counselors, and guides, of spiritual wisdom and the manifestation of divine grace. Through their ministry in the church, the mystery of God the Father was taught and the mission of Christ the Son and his Holy Spirit was clearly defined. The teach-