

Called to be Saints



A mass of attractive red bottlebrush (Callistemon) blooms can symbolise a large number of people, children of God, saints, developing and expressing God's love in beauty and radiant holiness to all they meet. Such an ideal concept may be hard to imagine, but it is what we Christians, followers of Jesus, are called to be. In Romans 1:7, Paul addressed the Christians in Rome as, "God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints."

'Saints' was the name often used to describe Christians in the early Church. The Greek word translated as 'saints' is also the word for 'holy', so Christians were identified as the holy people of God, set apart by God as members of the Church, the body of Christ, for a specific task. Can such a calling really apply to us today, and if so, how are we to respond to it?

We sometimes tend to forget that at our baptism we were set apart as people who promised, with God's help, to live as disciples of Christ, to love God with our whole heart and our neighbour as our self.

Being called to be saints or holy people, does not mean we are better or holier than others. Many non-Christians also love and care for others and, in a sense, are children of God. The difference is that, as baptised Christians, we believe we have a particular vocation to share God's love with others.

Our baptism was not an action done once and finished with, like registering the name of a new born child at the local registry office. Instead it was something that changed us, and with the help of the Holy Spirit should be continually shaping and guiding us. At baptism we started a life that goes on, as the Prayer Book says, until our "life's end".

As disciples of Christ, we know that to love God and our neighbour involves not just joy and peace, but struggle and suffering. Responding to God's call to be 'Christ' in the world does not result in a life of quiet loving reflection, surplus money given to the needy, and receiving the admiration of others. Rather it is a life when we are not always sure we know *how to* love others, or even if we *want* to love them, especially if we are feeling tired, irritable or fearful.

Revealing God's love sometimes requires us to courageously step forward and publicly say or do things to help others, but more often we are asked to show small acts of love and care for all those whom we meet each day.

During his life on earth, Jesus spent most of his time developing and embodying God's love in his ordinary every day experiences with family and neighbours in the town of Nazareth. Daily life was where he first showed something of the kingdom of God.

We are reminded of the ordinary events of life in Luke 13:18-19, when Jesus turned to gardening and cooking for images to explain God's kingdom to the people. The same images can speak to us today, encouraging and guiding us. A small mustard seed planted in a garden becomes a tree where birds can nest and produce their young. Next, some yeast is hidden in flour to raise the dough before it is cooked and becomes bread to eat. In time, both the seed and the yeast change to enable a tree and bread to come into being and benefit others.

Our words and actions offered in love may be small or hidden, but in time they will often, unknown to us, produce fruit in the lives of others. Producing fruit does not depend on us remembering what we said, or the quality of our continued prayer for a person, particularly when our thoughts occasionally wandered to other things.

On reflection, we may recognise how in the past the Holy Spirit sometimes changed our intended plan to care for someone. Perhaps we had to die to our own ideas, so we could engage in fulfilling God's much better plan for the well-being of that person.

In our lives, we all experience pain and suffering, as did Jesus in his relationships and his dying. Being a member of the body of Christ in the world may take us, at times, into a place where our suffering assists us to better understand and perhaps share in the pain of others, as we offer to them our compassion and love.

Although we Christians are called to be saints, we are not to focus on becoming saints. Rather, as followers of Jesus, we are called to work towards serving others by desiring and helping all human beings to flourish and become the beautiful people God created them to be. Like the bottlebrush blooms, we are all to be holy and set apart for God. But let us remember that the bottlebrush blooms pictured in this article are red, the colour of blood – the blood of life. Our calling is to a costly life in which we also need God's love and the help of others to flourish.

As saints and followers of Christ, the goal for all of us is to work with Christ to make the world in which we live to become like heaven, a place where God's love reigns.

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