

What is Your SQ (Saint Quotient)?

October 8, 2006

Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr.

Hear the word *saint*, and what comes to mind? Someone whose cup runneth over with the milk of human kindness? Someone who has a Ph. D. in spiritual development? Someone who has given her or his energies to a life of contemplation in a religious order, or to being a missionary in a place of great danger or terrible suffering? Someone who has worked a miracle or two and has had it verified? Someone who has mastered the art of turning the other cheek? Someone who has dedicated her or his life to others, and has subdued the errant passions that beset and bedevil most ordinary people in the process?

See the word *Saint* and you think of one of the apostolic community, a Peter or a Paul or a Mary Magdalene. Or you might think of one of the early Martyrs, or Doctors of the Church, such as Augustine.

Then there is St. Nicholas, who is jolly and cuddly and Christmassy. There is St. Anthony, who specializes in

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helping us find things, and people, who get lost. There is St. Christopher, whose task is to keep us protected from harm. There is St. Jude, the saint who watches over lost causes (and tone deaf choirs). And there is St. Valentine, the bearer of romance, just to name a few.

It would be tempting to speak of these notables in the pantheon of Christian living, and talk about how they reached a level of perfection above the rest. It would be tempting to hold up their example of sanctity, their witness of piety, their selfless deeds of service for all the rest of us to emulate. *But not today.*

These illustrious figures of the faith have their own holy days on which to be recognized and saluted for their contribution to the cause of Christ.

The *saints* that we salute and recognize today are a little more clay-footed, a little more down-to-earth

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than those I mentioned. They don't appear on a liturgical calendar. They've not been singled out for startling visions, or for leading history-altering crusades. They haven't moved mountains with their faith, or changed millions of lives by what they have written or said. They haven't climbed the loftiest rungs on the stairway to heaven.

Today, we hold up the *rank and file of the faith*. We recall the ones among us, seen and unseen, who have spoken and acted for Jesus in the world. We remember that no one comes to faith alone, and no one stays faithful alone. We were all brought to faith, and we are all sustained in the faith. Someone acted like Christ to you and me and was God's agent in *infecting* us with the Gospel.

There **are** no *natural born Christians*. It's not something you come endowed with; it's not part of our DNA, or our genetic code. No doubt God loved

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you from the start, but you didn't know about it. Someone brought it to your attention. And these *saints* we remember were not and are not *perfect*. In fact if you ask them, they would consider themselves anything but holier-than thou.

I'm reminded of the use of the term *saint in* the Book of Acts. It applies to each of us. All who are attempting to imitate Christ in their lives merit the title of *saint*. Some do it more fully than others, and are willing to let go of more to get the job done.

Certainly this was true of the *saints* that Paul the Apostle dealt with. Some in Corinth are willful and quarrelsome (1 Cor. 1:10-13). Still others are sexually irresponsible (1 Cor. 5:9-13). In Philippi, some use Christ purely for self-serving ends. Even the heavyweights of the faith, Cephas and Barnabas, can act like hypocrites, and out of keeping with the law of love (Gal. 2:11-14). And even Paul himself, after his

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conversion to Christ, maintained that: *I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but do the very thing I hate* (Rom. 7:15).

There's a wonderful little hymn in our Hymnal, #293, *I sing a song of the Saints of God* and it declares the saints we recall today are the ones who simply loved their Lord in the giving of their lives, working as a shepherdess, a doctor, a soldier, or a priest.

The ones who toiled in the dailiness of their lives, in the small change of their faith, in gratefulness to Jesus. Did these saints have a superior SQ (Spiritual Quotient)? Not actually. Did they have a special revelation that set them apart? Not especially. Did they reach a level of enlightenment beyond normal human parameters? Not really. Were they living a life-print of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic, Church. Nope. So what makes a *saint*? Well, *baptism into the body of Christ* is the correct ecclesiastical

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perspective. A less stained-glass answer might be something on the order of: *a saint is someone God uses*. Period.

Living into being a *saint* is not about niceness, but *newness*. It's about becoming a person, and a member of a community, whose purpose is to face in two directions: *to face Christ in faith* and *face the neighbor in love*. It's about a people willing to become infused with the life of God, and somehow to lay down their lives for others in the name of Christ. It's about a people with a passion to make a difference in a world in need of their love and mercy. It's about being a people who reverence that which the world considers worthless or useless. In the journey they have taken, these *saints* have found a new freedom and a new happiness in the Lord of Life. They have discovered a new purpose and zest in living. They have a new aura of hope, excitement, even playfulness. They are less into control and more into

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gratitude. They are more tolerant and less judgmental. Could it be that *saints* have more fun, seeing life from a new angle, like Lazarus must have exulted in his new life after being dead? We remember these saints. We remember them. **AMEN.**