

Wednesday 1st November; All Saints Day; Benefice Holy Communion Gilling

What is a Saint?

The first answer is, we all are! Because by our faith we are part of the blessed Communion of saints past, present and future, with who we are joined in Christ at every Holy Communion service.

Traditionally, a saint was a person acknowledged as holy or virtuous. In its most basic sense, a saint is a “holy one,” someone who is set apart for God's special purposes. As a result, every follower of Jesus Christ is a saint. The term secular saint, which has no strict definition, generally refers to someone venerated and respected for contributions to a noble cause, but not recognized as a canonical saint by a religion. The ranks of secular saints, like those of religious ones, are often filled by martyrs. Most people use the word “saint” to refer to someone who is exceptionally good or “holy.” In the Roman Catholic Church, however, a “saint” has a more specific meaning: someone who has led a life of “heroic virtue”. If the person performs a miracle that is a significant step to becoming a saint. He or she could be an exemplary model of faith, an extraordinary teacher, a wonder_worker or source of benevolent power, an intercessor leading a life often refusing material attachments or comforts, or a person in possession of a special and revelatory_relation to the holy, who we refer to as mystics.

How do we recognise a saint? Many will recall the 1970's TV series with Roger Moore who had a halo over his head. He went around do good deeds.

This halo, often is described as a shining light emanating from someone. The closer the relationship to God a person has the more prominent the ‘glow’ becomes. The

great Saint and theologian St. Augustine described it as a 'shudder' and a 'glow' within him, something that made him shudder because it was a Divine gift and something that glowed from him as the gift was revealed beyond his control.

In art we see the glow depicted as a halo around people, the word deriving from the Greek word 'nimbus' which means cloud, so the saint is surrounded by a cloud of holiness.

William Blake in the famous hymn Jerusalem describes the glow as the 'countenance divine'. On other occasions it is seen as light emanating from people especially during Communion. I have seen it in people occasionally and in the eyes of dying patients. Recently I had the most moving experience in hospital when I was called to a dying lady who appeared unconscious. Her daughter asked me to pray for her and I anointed her. As I was saying the words after anointing, she awoke and looked at me, and she was literally glowing! She mouthed the words 'thank you' twice and went back into unconsciousness. Her son and daughter were incredulous.

This glow I believe, is not something that we generate ourselves, it comes from outside as a gift of holiness that we take within us that makes us like Augustine shudder. The face of Moses shone with it after his encounter with Yahweh, the apostle and saints shone with it, Jesus revealed it in His full glory at the Transfiguration.

How does it come to us? We cannot say but it does if we allow it to, in prayer and sacrament, or in amazing insight, or in Scripture. The mystics experienced it and were transformed. What is this gift of the glow of sainthood? It is love; unmeasurable, constant, given to us as a divine spark waiting to be lit and revealed. At baptism we say to

the candidate 'shine as a light'. The Archbishop of York speak of being Jesus shaped in what we do, allowing the glow to be revealed. Whatever our calling, it will glow as the love of God works through us as it has done for millennia through His saints, to accept the gift. It will make us shudder as described by Augustine because it is the power of God, but we will also glow with His love, to give to all as His saints.

Thanks be to God. Amen.