

# For all the Saints

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The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'saint' as 'a person of great holiness'. Not a great deal of help there! It is daunting writing about saints; in some cases much is known about them in others very little. But their lives have always been very much a part of our Christian faith.

Children have been baptised with their names; churches have been dedicated to them, towns have been named after them. Scripture is full of references to them.

Stephen was one of the first to become a martyr. He was stoned to death – such cruelty was not unusual in those days.

St Augustine is reputed to be the first to bring Christianity to these shores. Strangely I don't know of many churches named after him. One would have expected many to claim him as their patron saint.

St Andrew, no doubt a humble man, fished on the lake of Genneserath. Someone once said that all truly great men are humble; probably true of all the saints.

St Alban gave his name, not only to a city but to a diocese. Bishops of St Albans have followed in his wake. With such a name he must have been Italian.

St Francis of Assisi will always be remembered for his love of the animal kingdom. Who can sing 'all things bright and beautiful' without thinking of him? It is surprising that not one of the animal charities has adopted him as a patron.

St Helena is not so well known. She was the wife of Constantia and mother of Emperor Constantine 1<sup>st</sup>. Today she is known for the little island in the South Atlantic which bears her name.

The mystic Julian of Norwich bequeathed us many wise sayings and Mother Teresa must be one of the saints of our age. She dedicated her life to caring for the poor in

the slums of Calcutta. A life lived without a thought of self.

There's the brothers of Jesus, James and John 'that disciple whom he loved' – surely one of the most memorable of quotations. And, of course, there is Mary herself. What must it have meant to her to see her son crucified? The death of a child is always sad, but to have watched her son killed in such circumstances required unusual courage.

There are many, many more. Martyrs, Teachers, Bishops, Missionaries, known and unknown.

The New Testament shows Peter ('the rock on which I build my church') as both saintly and human, with all the sins of impetuosity and, at times, unreliability.

St Paul is the reverse; an aloof, stern figure of unwavering belief, transformed on the road to Damascus from a zealous persecutor to the greatest 'defender of faith'. He travelled widely spreading the gospels and ultimately died for his faith.

Today there are many ordinary people, not 'trailing clouds of glory', but going about their business, quietly serving their God. Not saints in the eyes of the world but, possibly, in the eyes of the 'All-Seeing One' they are.

There is one hymn especially dedicated to the saints in each and every era. The stirring words, written by William Walsham How, inspire and encourage us.

*From earth's wide bounds,  
from oceans farthest coast  
Through gates of pearl  
streams in the countless host'  
Singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost  
Alleluia!*

May we strive with them and be ever faithful.