

“These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Apoc 7:14

On such a feast day as this we are dazzled with the sheer brilliance of the light radiating from heaven as God’s light pours down from above through the prismatic spectrum of all those who are now in heaven but who, whilst they were on earth, allowed the light of God to shine not just *into* their lives but *through* their lives and into the lives of others. This is what a saint is: someone who so humbled himself before Almighty God – so emptied himself of self – that God’s light shone with undimmed brightness right into the very depths of the saint’s soul and filled it with such splendour of heavenly light that it burst out and into the lives of the people around him.

Just as sunlight shines through the coloured glass of stained-glass windows and fills the whole body of the church, so God’s light shines through the lives of His saints and fills His church with His beauty. A veritable rainbow of kaleidoscopic glory tumbles down upon the heads of us all as we kneel here in prayer. And that, in a way, is why God raises up saints in His church: so that He can shower us with His truth, and His goodness, and His beauty.

We are all called to holiness. We are all called to a life of grace. We are all called to conform ourselves to the likeness of Christ. Through the grace of God, received in the Sacraments, and especially through frequent Holy Communion and regular Confession, we are raised up to be sharers in God’s divine nature. But this raising up demands penitence for our sins, penance and sacrifice – as Christ lived a life of penance and sacrifice – and an ever deepening faith, an ever surer hope, and an ever more inflamed charity.

Most of us are called by God to attain to this state of holiness in the course of our daily lives: by living out our Catholic Faith with fidelity on a day-to-day basis; by picking ourselves up again and again, with the help of God’s grace, when we fall; by clambering our way back onto the right

track whenever we wander off the path of virtue; and by offering up to God as penances the countless irritations and exasperations of daily life.

Yet in addition to pouring His grace into the lives of ordinary folk such as you and me, God also raises up, in every age of the Church, saints who are clearly recognized as saints, and who end up being canonized.

These saints have distinctive roles in the life of the Church. Certainly, they set for us an example. Raised up from so many different backgrounds, they show us how we might live, and how we might respond to the demands of daily life. They set us examples of how to face particular dilemmas, they teach us with their words of wisdom, and they show us how to triumph over adversity.

Their heroic virtue can sometimes leave us dispirited: ‘Oh, but I could never accomplish that!’ But we are not called to copy them in every particular. Instead, we should read the lives of the saints and take what we need and leave the rest. We should be prudent, and find those golden nuggets of virtue in the lives of the saints that will best help us in our individual situations.

But read the lives of the saints we must. After all, they are the ones who have come ‘out of the great tribulation. [And] have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’ In other words, the saints are the ones who have got it right. They are the ones who have actually lived the life of Catholic virtue and have won through to the end.

Yet there is a second reason God raises up saints from among His people, and that is to use them as channels – as viaducts – through which He can pour His graces into the body of the Church through their virtues and merits. For example, He may use a saint to raise up a new religious order such as the Dominicans, or Benedictines, or Carmelites. He may use a saint to pour wisdom into the mind of His Church in times of doubt and difficulty as He did with the teachings of the newest Doctor of the Church, St John Henry Newman, And He may use His saints to bring

light to a world so fallen into the darkness of sin that even common goodness is no longer recognized, as He did with the likes of St Theresa of Calcutta.

When He so raises saints, He endows them with gifts over and above what He ordinarily gives to the rest of us because He has chosen them for very specific tasks. It is our job to draw on the goodness of the saints and to apply that goodness to our lives so that we may become the saints that we are meant to be without trying to become the saint that God intended someone else to be, for, as St Catherine of Siena says, if each of us were to be who we were created to be, we would, together, be able to set the world on fire with God's love!