



The Problem with Saints

Peter McVerry SJ, well-known activist for the homeless, reminds us that saints always come to us in disguise.

St Mother Teresa was an extraordinary woman. She spent her life reaching out to the poorest of the poor and founded a religious congregation to continue her work.

St Francis Xavier travelled to the ends of the world to bring the Gospel to people who had never heard of Jesus, suffering attacks, hunger and cold on his journeys.

Many who died for their faith, sometimes suffering torture before death, are venerated as martyrs.

That's the problem. The message we are being given is that saints are extraordinary people, who do extraordinary things, things that we, ordinary people, would not, or could not, do. So, we cannot aspire to being a saint.

St Alphonsus Rodriguez is my kind of saint. He was a Jesuit brother who spent forty-six years as a doorkeeper at a Jesuit college in Spain. He did what all of us do every day – if we're not homeless – namely, answering the door to those who knock. He talked if they wanted to talk, he gave them



food if they asked for food. He was a saint because he did ordinary things, things that all of us do, and did them with love.


The twelve apostles are saints. While we know something about some of them, such as Matthew, Peter, John and James, we know absolutely nothing about the lives or achievements of most of the other apostles. In fact, for some of them we're not even sure of their correct names, as the names of the Apostles in the different Gospels vary slightly. If they had done anything extraordinary, it would have been recorded somewhere and we would know about it. They are saints because they did what Jesus called them to do, in an incon-



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extraordinary things. Sanctity means doing ordinary things with love in your heart. The parent who feeds the children, goes to the shops, cleans the house, is being a saint, just by doing those ordinary things. The parent who goes to work, returns home tired, has their dinner and sits in front of the television relaxing, is being a saint.

Imagine watching a beautiful, multi-coloured butterfly on a lovely summer day. All the butterfly does is to fly from flower to flower. Yet that butterfly reflects the beauty and glory of God, just by being a butterfly, and doing what butterflies do. How much more, then, do we human beings reflect the glory of God, just by doing what human beings do, living our ordinary daily lives. To be a saint is to reflect the glory of God. The newly-born baby, with no achievements to boast of, reflects the glory of God, just by being a baby. The paralysed person, who can only move eyes, reflects the glory of God, just by being a paralysed person. Every human being who lives their ordinary lives with love, whatever that life may entail, is a saint.

We have saints all around us, we live amongst them, but we do not recognise them, just as the people of Israel did not recognise the Son of God because he was so ordinary. They expected a mighty powerful warrior to come, who would conquer their external enemies, and so bring peace to the land of Israel. Jesus did not at all meet their expectations, quite the opposite indeed. Saints, like the Son of God, always come to us in disguise. 

spicuous, unassuming way.

St Joseph did nothing extraordinary. He reared the child Jesus, like every other parent who reared their child. He went to work to support his family, like every other working parent. But because the child he reared was the Son of God, he is perhaps the greatest saint of all.

Jesus himself spent thirty years living with his mother. His life was so ordinary that those from his own town of Nazareth, with whom he had grown up and played with as a child, could not accept that he was the Messiah, this extraordinary representative of God whom Israel had been awaiting for thousands of years.

Sanctity does not mean doing