

“EVERY SAINT HAS A PAST....EVERY SINNER HAS A FUTURE.”

Rev. Daniel White Sr.

St. Augustine coined it centuries ago but Oscar Wilde popularized it when he said: “The only difference between a saint and a sinner is that every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future.” What does that mean? For me it means that everyone who has been a Saint was, at one time, something less than saintly. Every person who was made a saint was once an ordinary Joe or Mary just like the rest of us. No one is born into “Sainthood.”

But it also states the same thing in reverse, saying that everyone who is now a sinner (which in Christian theology is everyone) has an opportunity to become a better person, the kind of person God intends us to become. So by that definition “sainthood” is not for a privilege few, it’s something available to all of us. God is always able to make us a better human being. So that’s our first “take away:” “Do not let your past dictate your future!” And do not underestimate the power of God to transform you.

If you study some of the Church saints they were anything but “saintly” before their conversion. A polygamist, military leaders, thieves, hermits, even a few playboys. Even our own Junipero Serra recently elevated to Sainthood is a controversial saint in many religious and secular circles. So it’s true: “Every saint has a past....and every sinner has a future.” But here’s the common denominator; “God did not let their past dictate their future.”

All of us are potential saints; it’s just that most of us will still have our day jobs, raise kids, cut the lawns, wash dishes, and maintain a household. Most won’t have Pope Francis elevate us to Sainthood or have a Holiday named after us or people lighting a candle in our honor. But so what? Remember, “saints” are ordinary people whose “way of being” changes the world and the people around them. It may be as simple as a smile, an encouraging word, a shoulder to lean on, a prayer by someone’s bedside—simple, profound acts that become “saintly.”

Ordinary saints are people who see something bigger than themselves and don’t succumb to the nay-sayers, the sarcasm and cynicism, so prevalent in our culture today. Ordinary saints are people like us who may be flawed and imperfect but strive to bring God’s light into the

dark places of our world and God's light into the shadows of the wounded souls around us.

Ordinary saints "do not let their past dictate their future."

Esteemed psychologist Abraham Maslow reminds us: "There are no perfect human beings!

Persons can be found who are good, very good indeed, in fact, great. And yet these very same people can at times be boring, irritating, petulant, selfish, angry, or depressed." He's right.

Ordinary saints are often brittle and fractured people but they remind us together we move beyond our problems to the possibilities waiting on the other side....move beyond any given obstacle to the opportunities God provides us to change lives for the better.

O.K. - Back-the-truck-up! I'm probably losing some of you right about now. Some of you may think this all sounds a bit too sentimental, a little too saccharin for those who prefer religion to be more "realistic and hard core." Fair enough. But trust me, it's not my intention to fill your hearts and minds with the equivalent of theological "marshmallow fluff" we see in so many religious circles these days, that has no direct bearing on how we act and feel in the daily reality show of our lives. Rather I'm extending an invitation to you to be more aware and grateful of those ordinary saints who have impacted and touched your life, bringing God's light into your darkness, extending a hand to lift you up, so you might find the courage to "pay it forward" to someone else.

Bottom line is that our world needs more than ever "ordinary saints." Our children and our children's children need people like you and me changing the world for the better. Ordinary saints shows us how to embrace our flawed humanity (warts and all) but also change the world "one person at a time," through words and deeds that reveal God's profound love, compassion, and justice.

You may have heard the name Dorothy Day. Recently Pope Francis called her out as "one of four great Americans." Born in 1897 from a well-established family, university educated, she converted to Catholicism and became a leading proponent of social justice primarily for the poor, disenfranchised, and the unemployed. She spent her life literally living out the injunctions of the Gospel. She passed away in 1980 and is revered by people of all faiths as a

modern-day saint. But did you know before her conversion, she had experienced failed love affairs, including a divorce, a child out of wedlock, a suicide attempt, and an abortion. This same saintly person evolved from a less than saintly life to embody the very spirit of Christ Himself. God did not allow Dorothy Day's past dictate her future.

You think you only possess a small light? I challenge you to uncover it and let it shine through you to bring more light and compassion into the hearts and minds of persons you encounter every day. "Every saint has a past....and every sinner has a future." God will not let "your past dictate your future." Be bold, be brave, and share the goodness and compassion God has planted in your hearts. And remember St. Paul's admonition: "In Jesus Christ we are a new creation; the old has passed away; behold, the new has come!" Amen.

Scripture: 2Corinthians 5: 16-21.