

What to say about the saints?

For the last two years, I've started worship on All Saints Sunday with Article XXI of the Augsburg Confession, but I've only ever read the first part. This year, I'm going to read the whole thing:

Concerning the cult of the saints our people teach that the saints are to be remembered so that we may strengthen our faith when we see how they experienced grace and how they were helped by faith. Moreover, it is taught that each person, according to his or her calling, should take the saints' good works as an example.

For instance, His Imperial Majesty, in a salutary and righteous fashion, may follow the example of David in waging war against the Turk. For both hold a royal office that demands defense and protection of their subjects.

However, it cannot be demonstrated from Scripture that a person should call upon the saints or seek help from them. "For there is only one single reconciler and mediator set up between God and humanity, Jesus Christ" (1 Timothy 2:5). He is the only savior, the only high priest, the mercy seat, and intercessor before God (Romans 8:34). He alone has promised to hear our prayers. According to Scripture, in all our needs and concerns it is the highest worship to seek and call upon this same Jesus Christ with our whole heart. "But if anyone does sin,

we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous ..." [1 John 2:1].

We all have saints in our lives: Kit Kleinhans is one of mine. She was (and, in some ways, still is) a mentor of mine. Who are yours? Family members, friends? Perhaps a Sunday school teacher?

Most communities have saints. When I posted "Throwback Thursday" pictures on the Facebook page, I posted a picture of a woman many recognized but no one actually used her first name; they all gave her a title. Grandma Moord. Great-grandma Moord. It's OK, I understand. My Gram went by many names, but only a very few people ever actually used her first name.

Our culture has saints. And this is where this sermon starts getting dicey. Did George Washington chop down a cherry tree as a child? Did he actually say "I cannot tell a lie"? Does it really matter? We're talking about this right now, as a nation.

So, let me say this now: no one is perfect. We're all sinful. That's not an excuse, it's reality. For us human beings, among ourselves, it's really just a matter of whether or not we think that what a person did that is good outweighs what he or she did that was bad.

(As an aside, we also have our villains, and I'm not sure that they're always as ... *villainous* as we sometimes make them out to be.)

Have you seen the musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*? It makes Joseph, son of Jacob, look pretty good. But if you read the Bible, Joseph was kind of a jerk. But that's not what makes him a saint...

There was only one perfect person. Jesus. That's why we have to be careful not to make Jesus in our image – because while we was us, he wasn't us: he understands our shortcomings and he loves us anyway. He died, both God and human, to bridge the gulf for us.

We have only one intercessor: Jesus. He intercedes for us with the Father. He knows our every weakness, and he knows what it is to be frail and fragile and to die. Jesus hears our prayers and wipes away our sins. And he's the only who does.

This is why we don't pray to the dead – or anyone who isn't God. This is also why we pray for “the friends and family of” and not the dead themselves.

We have only one savior: Jesus. He makes Lillian, Martha, Peggy, Jack, Richard, Eunice, and Butch saints. He makes all of us saints. All those who believe and are baptized are saints.

What to say about the saints? We all have saints in our lives. We remember specific saints today. And all the faithful are saints by Jesus' death and resurrection for us and for our salvation. Amen.