



**St. Andrew's By-the-Sea**

***The Episcopal Church  
in Destin, Florida***

**ALL SAINTS DAY**

OBSERVED

NOVEMBER 5, 2023

**A Homily by the Rev. James J. Popham**

When I was roughly 10 years old, I collected baseball cards. The ones wrapped up with a thin slab of gum. I recall trading all my All-Star cards for what was for me the Holy Grail of baseball cards, the 1958 Mickey Mantle card. They currently are for sale on eBay for \$700 to \$2700. But it occurred to me recently that wouldn't it be neat if we all were striving to be remembered in a series of "Saint" collector cards. Instead of your batting average, the back of the card might list statistics and events from our lives, for example, percentage of days without sin. Or percentage of Sundays we went to church. Or the longest streak of consecutive Sundays without missing church. Or the big one, the number of miracles attributed to us during our lives. It takes three, incidentally, to qualify for formal canonization as a saint in the Roman Catholic Church. Or maybe even a list of the denomination with which we have been affiliated at various times in our lives. Jim Popham Roman Catholic 1947-1998. Episcopalian 1998-2023. Jo Popham Episcopalian 1947 - 2023.

But then I realized that as a young lad in parochial school, we actually did have "holy cards." Usually, they had the picture of a saint on the front and some suitable prayer on the back. I am sure today we would find a broad selection at any reputable Catholic bookstore. Or try the "shop by saint" page on [TotallyCatholic.com](http://TotallyCatholic.com).

Just imagine the ineffable joy of having our very own holy card or saint collectors card. What would they be worth on Ebay?

But then that begs the big question, the one we might well ask today as we observe All Saints Day, how do we become a Saint?

We could offer any number of answers, but as we hear so often from this pulpit, it boils down to one thing: Love God and love your neighbor as yourself.

Of course, getting baptized, sealed with the Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever might make it official.

And we might recall, too, that we are children of God, as we heard in the reading from the first epistle of John. Or as the catechism says:

The communion of saints is the whole family of God, the living and the dead, those whom we love and those whom we hurt, bound together in Christ by sacrament, prayer, and praise.

But let me suggest an answer we will never find in any catechism. We just need to be ourselves. Because no one on earth is just like we are. Geneticists tell us that when our DNA or unique genetic code is formed from the union of our parents, we can expect about 600 mutations to affect our DNA. And about 60 of those will be significant or noticeable. I am the son of a mother of French heritage and a father of English heritage. And I was born with red hair. Prompting my grandfather to ask my mother, "What Irishman chased you?" You get the idea. Each and everyone one of us from conception is a completely unique individual, a one-of-a-kind, a never to be repeated individual.

And we are hard-wired with a distinctive array of God-given gifts and skills and talents, and challenged by an equally distinctive array of built-in phobias and predispositions and addictions.

No two lives are alike. We each live only our own lives, and each of us must navigate our environments as who we are. No one else can do it for us.

So I say we should become saints in the only way we can: by being ourselves. And that means discerning our own array of God-given gifts, skills, and talents. It means using our gifts to fulfill our calls to be stewards of creation. It means doing what we can best do to bring about the realization of God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. It means being an example how one lives as a follower of Christ in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It means knowing, loving, and serving God as only we can do as the unique products of God's creation each of us is.

But it also means admitting our particular distractions and tendencies to sin. It calls for self-awareness that looks beyond what we are conscious of when we look in the mirror to what lurks in our subconscious and causes us to stumble and fall.

We must learn about ourselves not only from ourselves, but also from others. From our families, our friends, our church communities, even our therapists and spiritual directors. And, of course, from the presence of Christ in our hearts and the promptings of the Holy Spirit through prayer and reflection. Then we truly can see and appreciate what our gifts are.

We also will see clearly the obstacles in our make-up that we must overcome. We then will begin to comprehend at a very deep level what truly will fulfill us and enable us to reflect God's image in our own very individual and distinctive way.

And if we can just live into that comprehensive understanding and appreciation of who we are, then in my humble opinion, the catechism notwithstanding, we become saints.

Will we get a trading card with our picture on front and a delineation of our good works and associations? Not so sure about that.

And are we then a member of some exclusive club or society? The catechism calls us members of the communion of saints, defined as:

...[T]he the whole family of God, the living and the dead, those whom we love and those whom we hurt, bound together in Christ by sacrament, prayer, and praise.

Does it sound like an exclusive club? The "whole family of God?"

And bonus, we can live fully in anticipation of something so extraordinary that it is beyond our complete comprehension and full understanding. But that does not make us coddiwomplers. (In case anyone is wondering, a coddiwompler is someone who coddiwomples, that is someone who "travels purposely in a purposeful manner to a vague destination.")<sup>1</sup> We know our destination. Our destination, our destiny is "Eternal life in the fullness of God's love." That is how we define salvation.

We might be quizzical about the specifics of eternal life at times, but never skeptical. We might have doubts, but let us never succumb to hopelessness, just because we do not know all the details. We may not know everything, but we know enough.

As John reminds us, "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed."

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<sup>1</sup> "25 Words Every Traveller Should Have in Their Vocabulary," <https://hopscotchtheglobe.com/25-words-every-traveller-should-have-in-their-vocabulary/> (accessed November 2, 2023).

Paul, too, embraced this notion, when he wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians:

For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. ...For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

He would also report in his second letter to the Corinthians that:

I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows.<sup>3</sup> And I know that such a person – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows –<sup>4</sup> was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat.

That message of anticipation and mystery is to me striking and powerful. The rational and scientific cells in my brain rebel. But in my heart and soul and body I am exhilarated, even as my mind reels. I cannot explain it, but it is a real to me as the nose on my face.

So let us live in hope. In anticipation. In mystery.

And let's live as who we are, as only we can be. That pugnacious Popeye the sailorman of cartoon yore may have said it best. "I yam what I yam."

So may we never become coddiwomplers."

May we all be the best that we can be.

May we all be all that we can be.

May we all be the saints God created us to be.