

Called to be Saints 2

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Now one word we didn't mention is the Greek word "hagios". And it comes out in that English word hagiography which would be, I suppose, the study of the saint's lives. And "hagios" mean just holy.

And that's the same word that we mean when we use the word 'saint', only ours comes from that Latin word "sanctus". And that gives us "sanctify". And you remember, "holy" brings out, in a way, the human and divine factors in being a saint. Just as the word sanctify brings them out. You remember, in the phrase, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." That means first of all to set it apart 'from' ordinary use. So the preposition 'from' is the important one there. Set the Sabbath day apart 'from' ordinary use. And then, "Remember, the Sabbath day to keep it holy," means to set it apart 'to' God for his use. And 'to' is the important preposition there.

So even that word "hagios" brings out that there is a human and divine factor in being a saint. At whatever stage in the Christian life you're called to be a saint, there is both the human and divine factor. You remember in the Old Testament they set the sacrifice 'on the altar', but that was only part of it, that was the human side. They set the sacrifice on the altar, and then the fire of God's Spirit burned up that sacrifice and made it holy. So you can see that there's a sense in which we make ourselves holy, we set ourselves apart from certain things that are wrong in our lives, but there's a real sense in which God is the one who alone can make us holy.

And we saw that, you remember, in the word 'sanctify' in Leviticus 20. And you might not want to bother, but I'd just remind you of Leviticus 20:7-8 where the human and the divine side is really talked about. In Leviticus 20:7, it says, "Consecrate yourselves therefore," and that is the human part. "Con" is Latin and "Secro" is a Latin verb, "to separate." And 'consecrate' means to separate yourselves 'from' the things that are wrong in your life. And then in Leviticus 20:8, "Keep my statutes, and do them; I am the LORD who sanctify you." "I am the one alone who can make you holy. But you yourselves are responsible for separating yourselves, or being willing to be separated from the things that are unholy in your own life."

In practical terms then, we talked about a new born Christian as being one who believed that Jesus, who lived in the first century AD, was really the Son of God, the Son of the Maker of the world. A new born Christian believes that in his head first of all. Then he believes that the Creator allowed this Son of his to experience physical and spiritual death so that he himself could maintain his own just declaration that he would punish sin wherever he found it, and yet was able to forgive us sinners. A Christian believes therefore, that God allowed his own Son to die in our place for our sins, and that God is able to forgive us for that 'if' we really believe.

And it's strange dear ones, that you can't get away from this combination of belief and action. Even in the very words that the Bible uses, "believe" is 'be' in Anglo-Saxon, and "Liefan". And it means to 'be in accordance with'. So if a Christian really believes that Jesus has died as a result of his sins, then he must be in accordance with that. And he must himself, stop thrusting the sword into Christ's side any longer. He must stop putting nails into Christ's hands any longer.

And dear ones, whatever words you look at in the New Testament it always holds this idea of "being in accordance with what you believe." And it's not just a head belief, you see, but it's a life action. "I believe that this is hurting the Son of God, therefore I stop it." "Pistis", the Greek word for faith, is the same, it falls over into obedience. It really topples over into the meaning

of obedience.

The very word that we use in the New Testament for 'faith' has obedience running right through it. In other words, if you trust him, you obey him. If I believe you're going to roll back the Red Sea, I put my feet into it. If I believe that my sarcasm has killed you, Lord Jesus, I stop the sarcasm.

Otherwise, I prove that I don't believe. If I believe that the deception of Jacob and the deception and lying in my life has crucified you, then I turn from the lies. There's no point in saying, "Alright, Blondini [Charles Blondin, 1824 – 1897) was a French tightrope walker and acrobat]. Alright, you can take me across the rope over the Niagara Falls in a wheelbarrow; you can take any man over it. But I don't think I'll try it just now. I don't trust you to get me across right now." If you believe then you act.

Dear ones, if we would only do that we would experience God's power in making us saints. If you have not entered into the new birth it is because you have not been willing to turn from those things. A dear one, after the service yesterday said, "Well now you do seem to imply that we really do produce this result in ourselves." Now dear ones, here's the fact, we turn from the lies; Jesus fills our mouth with truth. We turn from the sarcasm; Jesus fills our mouth with words of love. We turn from the unkindness; Jesus through the Spirit, fills us with kindness.

You see, even if we're a new born Christian we turn from the things that are wrong and God fills us with the positive godliness. So, we are responsible for turning from those things. Maybe I follow Nee [Watchman Nee, 1903 – 1972), a Chinese church leader and Christian teacher] too much but Nee says, "Can a sinner turn from his sins? Of course he can, and he's responsible to do it." And dear ones, I think we are. We can put it in lots of terms, "be willing to turn from them." But one way or another we must be at least as determined as the 'moral rearmament' people are. We must be at least as determined as them and say, "We'll turn from these things. We know you have to fill us with your positive goodness, but we will turn from these things." And when we do, God is able to work in us.

Now you remember, we suggested along the lines of the verse in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 that there were, as it were, three ways in which a Christian is called to be a saint. And you remember 1 Thessalonians 5:23 says, "May the God of peace himself sanctify you." "Sanctify you; make you wholly." And preserve your body, your soul, and your spirit blameless until the coming of the Lord Jesus." And I think in a real way dear ones, though I'm sure ever analogy is a little inadequate, I think in a real way God wants to make us saints in our bodies, in our souls, and in our spirits.

He wants to set us apart wholly, in our bodies, from the uses of this world. That's what happens when you become a Christian. When you're a new born Christian your outward acts and words become wholly set apart to God, because you're prepared to set apart yourself from the acts and words that are disobedient to his commands, and he himself is prepared to fill you with acts and words that are obedient and pleasing to his will. So in a real way, at the level of the body, at the level of the outward acts and words, a Christian becomes a saint.

Now could we look at what I think is the second factor involved? And the second factor that God soon begins to touch in our Christian lives is the spirit. And it is his desire that the spirit should be sanctified wholly. You remember, that old Peter was a real Christian. You remember that, and you can follow it out in your own mind if you just think of the things he did and said. You remember, he was the one who said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." So Peter believed that Jesus was God's Son.

Now Peter also believed that Jesus, eventually -- it took him a long time, but he eventually came to the realization that Jesus meant what he said when he said, "I am come to give my life a ransom for many." And Peter believed that Jesus was going to die for the sins of mankind and for himself. You remember he, therefore, had set himself apart from his material possessions. He believed what Jesus said about those and he set himself apart from the material possessions, and from the outward sins of profane language and from thoughtless impulsive language. He set himself apart from those outward acts and words that were disobedient to God.

And you remember, God had owned him as one of his own. He had given him power to cast out demons, and he had owned him by the personal love that Jesus gave to him. And yet dear ones, although outwardly Peter was a Christian, yet inwardly there rankled in his heart a personal rebellion against God. There rankled deep down within Peter a personal rebellion against God which finally broke out and laid waste, even the victory that existed in his outward Christian life, in a courtyard in about 29 AD. Now Peter was a Christian, but there was this rebellion within him which eventually broke out.

Dear ones, some would say, "Well, can you remain a Christian without going on to the fullness of the Spirit; without allowing God to make your spirit holy?" I don't think you can. I don't think you can hold the stuff down long enough. I don't think you can hold anger down long enough, dear ones. If there is some rebellion rankling there, I think that has to be dealt with. Otherwise it eventually breaks out in open sin, and you lose even your justification. You lose even your salvation state.

Now Peter was in this kind of position, and I think many Christians are like him. Many of us are outwardly Christians, but inwardly we feel a periodic desire to return to our old ways. We feel a propensity for sinning. We feel an inclination at times to disobey God. Now dear ones, here is the glorious message. One of the old holiness preachers said it, "Salvation at its lowest is salvation from sin. Salvation at its highest is salvation from the inclination to sin."

Now dear ones, that's why you can be a victorious Christian, not because you're holding all this stuff down better than everybody else, or because you've a stronger will than everybody else, but because the Holy Spirit has dealt with all that stuff. In other words, God can save us from even this propensity to sin. Yes, we need to continue to be under the Holy Spirit. We need to continue to be trusting him. There is no place for that self assurance that says, "I cannot sin." But "there is a place of quiet rest near to the heart of God," where you can be cleansed from even that inclination to sin.

Now you can see it if you look at Peter. Like Peter, many of us find it easy to follow Jesus at the beginning. It's such a message of life to us that we desire to go out after him, and we're anxious to obey his words as Peter was. But gradually like Peter, we sense a little inner resistance, growing inside us, to God's will, or to the way Jesus is leading us, just a little inner desire to control our surrender to God. We look around at everybody else and we say, "Well, they aren't surrendering everything. They're getting on with their lives and their jobs. Well why don't I? Why should I go into this full surrender? Why should I lay myself flat out to be walked over?"

And there grows within many Christians a little of this inner resistance to God's will, a slight desire just to control our own surrender to his will, and especially, when we see that the way he's leading us is going to lead us to defeat in the world's eyes; to failure in the word's eyes; to

failure in our careers, our professional lives, our financial success, or our family lives: apparent failure. And we tend to stop back at that moment and hesitate. And then eventually like old Peter, God allows us to come into some pressure situation. And you know that when an orange is squeezed what is in it comes out, or when you squeeze a sponge that is damp, the water that is in it comes out. And God allows us to come into some pressure situation which calls for an immediate response, or an unpremeditated reaction, and before we know it what is in there of inner resistance to God's will, what is in there of our assertion of ourselves, comes out in some angry word or some irritable conversation.

And God, lest we begin to think this is just a temporary slip, God deals with us like Peter: he allows us to repeat this outward rebellion a second time, and a third time until the cock crows, and then a fourth time, and then a fifth time until, like Peter we say, "I do not know the man." And then we cry like Paul, "The good that I would I do not do and the evil that I do not want, that's the very thing I do. Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" And it's the testimony of Paul in Romans, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" It is possible to be delivered from that inner rebellion against God, dear ones. It is possible to be delivered through the power of the Holy Spirit.

God wants us to be holy in our spirits. He doesn't want you only to look good on the outside, and to look happy, but to 'be' happy on the inside. He doesn't want you only to look patient, he wants you to feel patient. He doesn't want a surging rebellion inside your heart, because that is half victory and half defeat. And, as with Peter, you can have the complete victory.

You remember, it came with him: the wee girl standing in the courtyard? He wouldn't even confess to her that he was one of the disciples. And yet, would you like to look at Acts 2:23, at the change that was wrought in him? You probably know it already and have heard it often. Peter, who was afraid for his own sake and for his own reputation to confess that he was one of the followers of Jesus to the little maid in the courtyard, this Peter got up in front of the people who had murdered Jesus, and he said, "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men."

And the change that had been wrought in Peter was described later on in Acts 15:9 by him when he said, "On that day, the Holy Spirit cleansed our hearts by faith." And it is God's will for us this morning that we should have our spirits cleansed by the Holy Spirit. Not only that we should be holy in outward life, but we should be holy in heart. Not only that we should be holy in our acts and our words, but that we should be holy in our attitudes, and our motives, and our inclinations, and our desires, so that there should be pure, clear water of life, flowing right from the very part of our heart, from the very ground of our heart. And it is God's plan that we should all experience that. And dear ones we need to go onto it if we're going to remain even saints.

I think the first task for us to do is to allow the Holy Spirit to show us what is down there. And it might help just to look at what was in Peter's heart in the courtyard. And you, allow the Holy Spirit to reveal to you, dear ones, and to reveal to me, if any of this is in our hearts. And it might be good just to note it down and check it over for yourself in prayer.

First of all, I think you can see there was a resistance to God's will in Peter's heart. There was something within him that rose up to question God's wisdom when he saw Jesus refusing to defend himself. He just sensed a resistance to the apparent will of God in this situation. There was just that slight feeling within him, that slight desire to do what Eve did in the Garden of Eden, to

question, "Hath God said you shall not eat of all the trees of the garden?" Just a little resistance to God's will.

Dear ones, that's the way it often starts. The vacation comes and you feel, "Well, a little vacation from all that Bible study would not do too much harm, and a little cutting down of the prayer time would not affect my relationship with God too much." Just a slight resistance to God's will. And that's part of the expression of this old self-centered spirit.

You can see too, in Peter, that there was independence within, because he certainly had some independent thought in his mind when he reckoned that there was perhaps a better way for Jesus to bring in the kingdom than this. This was what he was rebelling against. He could not stand the thought of Jesus going in there, allowing himself to be arrested, and allowing himself to be crucified. Obviously because he thought there was an alternative way.

And dear ones, in many Christians in these days, there is this feeling within them, "Surely God could do it some other way in my life." And we want to plane away our cross; we want to just cut it down a little. "Surely Jesus just doesn't want us to go this way." And we feel, "There must be some other way by which we could achieve the same thing for God." There's just a slight independence within us of God.

You can see in Peter too there was a desire to save himself. There was. Obviously, he was not anxious to confess to this little maid that he was one of the disciples. And again, and again in our Christian lives I think many of us have felt this desire, a slight desire to just save ourselves, to ease up a little, not to pour out ourselves completely and fully, but to save ourselves. Even dear ones, don't you think we have a desire to save ourselves for the next meeting? We have a desire to save ourselves for the next meeting either as preachers or as people. We have a desire not to give everything out. Dear ones, you find when you give everything out then he fills it all up again. But we have this desire to save ourselves a little, just to pull back. Someone comes to us for personal conversation and we feel, "Well we have all that ahead of us this evening." Even in personal witness, don't we feel this? "We have all this work to do and we must save ourselves for it." That's the old self saying, "You must save yourself. You must take the responsibility on yourself to provide energy for the future." Dear ones, this was part of Peter's trouble. This was part of the rebellion of the Spirit against God.

You can see also that he was concerned with the reputation and the status. He really was concerned with what the people in that courtyard thought of him. He didn't want them to think that he was one of the followers, the stupid followers of this Galilean who was giving himself up without a fight. He was concerned about his reputation and his status.

Are you? It seems that we're so bound up in this. Are you, dear ones? Are you still concerned with what people think of you? Do you see that even if you're trying to keep up a Christian witness though you don't feel like a Christian within, that's exactly the grip that the devil has on you? It's because you want to keep up that reputation with your dear ones. And Satan twists us around in this. He says, "Ah but it's for the best reason. You don't want them to lose their faith just because you confess your present state."

But you see, it's when we're honest that God is able to work in their hearts. So, I'd just ask you, "Are you concerned still with your own reputation and your status among people? Are you?" If you are dear ones, it shows that the old self is still very much alive, that your spirit is still not

sanctified wholly by God.

And do you see again, what I'm saying is not that you're bad because of that, not that you're bad, but because, if you don't allow God to deal with that, it will still break out in open sin, and you'll lose even your salvation? And so it's vital to let him deal with that.

You see, all these things show like an iceberg, one tenth above the surface of the water and below is nine tenths of brittle, solid ice. And that's what God has to thaw through his Holy Spirit. It's not just this little pinnacle up here. We're looking at the little pinnacles, but underneath every one of these attitudes is a whole self that is antagonistic to God, and really doesn't want what he wants, even though we think it does.

You can see in Peter that there was a concern with his future. He really felt that he had to provide for the future. If this man was going down to the cross, well, he had still his life to live. And there was a concern in him for his future. And I think this is another mark of the old self life, when we're still concerned about the future.

Young men and women, I destroyed anything that God would be able to do in me during the early years of my ministry, because I was so anxious for the future to go a certain way. Really! And you know, it's very tricky wanting to be like John Wesley, isn't it? You're never sure whether it's really to have the 'purity' of John Wesley or whether it's to have the 'success' of John Wesley. And I think we need to be very careful at this stage in our lives what our attitude to the future is. Have we really handed it into God's hands, or are we saying, "We put it in your hands Father, as long as it turns out this way, and as long as it turns out in a satisfactory way that makes full use of all my 'great talents'."? And I think when we put that condition on it, we're really still concerned with the future. I think that's a mark of the old self, when we're still concerned with the future. And that is something that God can cleanse from us.

I think you can see from Peter that he felt a concern that his own rights had to be defended and insisted on. I mean, he had to just stand up for himself. Jesus was prepared to be trampled over, he was certainly not. And he felt he had to defend his own rights and to stand up for himself, "No, I'm not one of those men. No, you can't treat me as you treat him."

And I think there's a strong feeling in many of us that we're not prepared to be baptized into Jesus' death. We're not prepared to go down an ignominious Calvary road like him. We're not prepared to be treated as if we were nothing, as if we were the refuse under men's feet. We're not prepared -- you know how we say it, "We're not prepared to be a door mat." Well dear ones, it's strange, but when you're ready to 'be' a door mat for God, then he stands up in his own dignity inside you, and people see his dignity and not your false self-assertiveness.

Well, Peter had a feeling that he ought to defend his own rights. And you can see of course, that he had his own way of doing things. He already showed that when he slashed the ear off the servant, you remember. Peter had his own way of doing things. And so often Christians feel a desire to do things they're own way. We can always think of a better way to do it than God can. In other words, inside Peter there was this desire to assert himself and defend himself.

Now this was Peter, the converted Christian, the saint at the level of the acts and words, but whenever he came into a pressure situation, what was inside in his spirit came out in the acts and words. And he denied his Lord. And it is the same with us, dear ones.

Now what does the Bible say? Well the Bible says that all these tendencies of ours come from the 'old self'. That's the thing deep down within us, the 'real us'. And the 'old self' is the one that wants to assert itself and defend itself. The 'old self' is the spirit that produces envy, and jealousy, and anger. The 'old self' is what wants to be praised by other people, and feels let down when we don't receive the credit that's due to us.

The 'old self' is the thing that wants to exhibit its cleverness, or wants to exhibit how well it can pray or how well it can preach. And the Bible says that the 'old self', that self-concern -- it's not the metaphysical self, dear ones. It's not that God wants to whip out your personality, but it's that self-centeredness. It's that self-regard. It's that self-concern. It's that self-love. It's that desire to refer everything that happens around us to ourselves and how it affects 'me'. It's that 'old self' that is the trouble. And really, you can't train it up. It needs to be sanctified. It needs really to be sanctified.

And the conditions for allowing God to sanctify it are the same as in the new birth. You must separate yourself from the 'old self', and you must allow God to crucify it on the cross of Jesus. So there are two sides of it you see. You need to come to a place where you're 'really' willing to 'die to self', where you're 'really' willing to die to your own rights, to die to your concern for the future, to die for your concern for your reputation and your status, to die to your desire to have your own way, to die to your desire even to question God's will, to die to your desire to be angry, to die to your desire to assert your own dignity and your own self-assertiveness and to defend yourself. You need to be ready to die to those things.

Now you cannot die to them yourself. But you need to be willing to separate yourself from them. And then you need to come to the place where you see that it is true in Romans 6:6, that Jesus did not only bear your sins to the cross, but he bore 'you' to the cross. And he bore that 'old self' and nailed it there. And just as your sins can be removed from your life in the outward life, so this sin, this independence within, can be cleansed from your spirit by the Holy Spirit.

See, the Holy Spirit is able to take of the things of Jesus and give them to us. Now whatever Jesus has wrought on the cross, we are able to experience in our lives. Now Jesus had your old self crucified with him on the cross, so you're able to experience that by the working of God's Holy Spirit in you.

But the two sides are necessary. You have to be willing to be separated from self and to bear the results of that. And then you have to look to God and trust him through the Holy Spirit to crucify that old self on the cross, and to fill the vacuum left by that with his Holy Spirit. And his Holy Spirit desires only to love him with all its hearts, and soul, and strength, and mind. And that Holy Spirit is able to be yours.

Well dear ones, have you experienced saintliness at that level? Or do you still know what anger is? Do you still know what envy is? Do you still know what a niggling jealousy is? Do you still know what irritability is in the home, though you hold it down? Do you still know what proud ambition is, though you keep it covered up with your surface modesty? Do you still know what these things are in your heart? If you do, God wants you to be holy in there as well. He wants you to be set apart utterly from yourself and from self's desires and be set apart, holy to him.

Dear ones, God is able to do this for you. He is able to do this, really. He is able to do this in

your heart and your life. He is able to do it in your spirit. The conditions are the same: Are you willing to die to self? Are you willing to set yourself apart? And are you willing to allow him to fill you with his Holy Spirit, which will produce holy desires in you? Well I pray that during these days you'll enter into this great victory inside.

I think this is the second way in which we're asked to be holy, and asked to be saints in our spirits. Amen.