

Hymns of the Church – Hymn 243 – *I sing a song of the saints of God* – 16 July 2019, Anno Domini (In the Year of our Lord)

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. (1 Peter 2:2-3)



I sing a song of the saints of God

I sing a song of the saints of God,
Patient and brave and true,
Who toiled and fought and lived and died
For the Lord they loved and knew.
And one was a doctor, and one was a queen,
And one was a shepherdess on the green;
They were all of them saints of God, and I mean,
God helping, to be one too.

They loved their Lord so dear, so dear,
And his love made them strong;
And they followed the right for Jesus' sake
The whole of their good lives long.
And one was a soldier, and one was a beast,
And one was slain by a fierce wild priest;
And there's not any reason, no, not the least,
Why I shouldn't be one too.

They lived not only in ages past,
There are hundreds of thousands still.
The world is bright with the joyous saints
Who love to do Jesus' will.
You can meet them in school, or in planes, or at sea,
In church, or in trains, or in shops, or at tea;
For the saints of God are just folk like me,
And I mean to be one too.

The Lord Jesus Christ told us unless we become as "*little children, we shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.*" How deftly do we pass over these words believing that they are simply figurative in some way that no one can understand. The

words of Christ are so simple and direct that only a calloused adult could miss the meaning here. Children understand them, and children understand the nature of Christ far better than most seasoned theologians. Knowing Christ is not an accommodation of the brain, but of the heart. And none have purer hearts than the little children. The Hymnal (1940) provides a number of children's hymns such as the Crusader Hymn (Fairest Lord Jesus) – though not listed as a children's hymn, it surely is, Once in Royal David's City; and the hymn that is subject of this devotion today, **I Will Sing a Song of the Saints of God**. Do not be put off by the category to which these hymns are allocated, for the most robust soldier, the most daring heroine of women, and the most tender and innocent of children can draw spiritual nourishment from these hymns. We would best remember that we all, who bear the name of Christ, are children in the family of God. If we are not, we shall in wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven – PERIOD!

This hymn is an appropriate selection to be sung in worship on All Saints Day. It was written by Lesbia Scott and published in England in 1929 to a tune (written in 1940) by Mr. John H. Hopkins entitled, '*Grand Isle*.' It is a rousing march particularly adapted to the spirit of children and of armies. It teaches those virtues that are so important to be taught to children in early development, but which are conspicuously missing from the modern families – virtues of patience, bravery, truth, labor, sacrifice, and honor. Mrs. Scott wrote this, and many other children's hymns, for which she also wrote the music and sang to them while in her twenties. She must have been a truly gracious and loving mother.

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for the Lord they loved and knew.
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and one was a shepherdess on the green;
they were all of them saints of God, and I mean,
God helping, to be one too.

When we sing the Godly words, to the music which is likewise Godly, we must contemplate the expansive description of the saints whom we have both known and read about. Remember the simple shepherds, "keeping watch over their flocks by night" on a lonely hillside outside Bethlehem while the village slept. The great Angels did not appear to royalty to announce the birth of the Christ-Child, but to simple men of little means. God also informed the minds of the Wise men of Persia of the birth. And on the sad night of the betrayal of our Lord and Savior, He informed the mind of Pilate's wife (Claudia Procula, according to Apocryphal works) of the Person who stood before the judgment seat of her weak and politically correct husband. "*When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.*" (Matt 27:19) So, too, do the saints of God come in all sizes, shapes, and walks of life.

They loved their Lord so dear, so dear,
and his love made them strong;
and they followed the right for Jesus' sake
the whole of their good lives long.
And one was a soldier, and one was a priest,
and one was slain by a fierce wild beast;
and there's not any reason, no, not the least,
why I shouldn't be one too.

What characteristic is most distinguishing of a saint of God? If you answered, "Love of God and His people," you would be correct. And, even as the second stanza says, the characteristic that makes them so very strong is that love mentioned. Many have died the martyr's death out of that unrelenting love for Christ. If you consider yourself a Christian, true and blue, you must also be a saint for the two are synonymous. When we speak of Saints, such as Matthew and Luke, we do not differentiate between them and the true Christian of today, except in office. Since we bow to no man, we do not bow down before saints either ancient or contemporary, for all are fellow servants of God.

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there are hundreds of thousands still.
The world is bright with the joyous saints
who love to do Jesus' will.
You can meet them in school, or in planes, or at sea,
In church, or in trains, or in shops, or at tea;
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I believe there are very great saints living in far off lands – many are members of the Anglican Orthodox church who live in daily trials and dangers. Those who profess their Christian faith in Muslim countries are in great danger for their very lives. They live in places such as Nigeria, Kenya, Pakistan, and even India. Love is always made richer by trial and tribulation. Perhaps the faith of the saints in America will undergo some great trials in the near future as government continues its attempt to eliminate every vestige of the Christian faith. But that will only make us stronger!

Another feature of the saints of God mentioned in our hymn today is Joy! Even under very difficult and trying circumstances, the saints of God of every age and profession are made joyful in their courage and fortitude. There is a deep seated joy that accompanies the knowledge of duty faithfully and sacrificially performed. So, even if the road is made rough and hazardous for us, our joy is multiplied in finishing a race of such challenge. If the road were smooth all the way, what accomplishment could we claim in completing our travels?

It is a mystery known only to God as to why some of his choicest saints are poor and of humble estate. But it is even a greater mystery that some are quite wealthy. The common value that crosses the lines of wealth and poverty is the fact that both, if they are truly Christian, are willing to sacrifice all for the benefit of Christ, or for the poor and orphaned.

There are far more saints today than our minds can imagine. We pass them daily on the public streets without knowing them to be saints, for they are unpretentious. Last week, my wife had been working in our patio garden and suddenly realized she needed some seed. She rushed, in her garden clothes, to Winn-Dixie. While there, she bought a cart full of groceries. When she went to the cashier to pay, she realized she did not have her wallet. She asked the cashier to hold her merchandise while she went home to get some money. On her return in fifteen minutes, the cashier explained that the lady who had been in line behind my wife had paid the bill. She asked the cashier to keep her identity private. I believe that dear saint must have thought my wife did not have money to buy groceries because of her appearing poorly dressed in her garden work clothes.

We have brothers and sister whose language we could never understand who are true saints of God. Many of them suffer terrible conditions of persecution. Just yesterday, a church was bombed in Peshawar, Pakistan where we have the greatest concentration of our churches in Pakistan (All Saints Church). I have been unable to get word from our bishop there to find out if any of our dear people were involved, but, whether our church or not, these are our brothers and sisters who have suffered loss there.

If we are the children of God, and we are so if we belong to Christ, then we belong to One family. A family dines together (Holy Communion), sings together, and communes together around the table to discuss the matters of the heart. That is the purpose of the Church – it is the home of the saints, and Christ is ALWAYS the Head of that family. In reality, there are only two families – those of god, and those of the fallen Prince of the Air. There is no such thing as the so-called “brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of god” in the expansive sense given the term in our day. We are only brothers and sister to those who have the same Father we have.