

## **Solemnity of All Saints – November 1, 2015**

In St. Michael's grammar school, we were warned that the only real tragedy in life was not to become a saint. To avoid such a horrible tragedy, we were exposed to the official saints of the Catholic Church. They came from every century and every walk of life. Some of them seemed extraordinarily strange to me and impossibly exotic. How was it possible for a saint to emerge from my small, nondescript hometown of Derby, CT, I wondered? The more saints I came to know, the more my life began to look like a tragedy in the making.

At some point on my journey, I moved my attention from lists of official saints to random saintly moments in the lives of ordinary people. A line from one of Flannery O'Connor's short stories suggests that when the sun strikes the trees in a certain way, even the meanest of them sparkles. That's one way I like to think about becoming a saint. All of us, no matter our shortcomings, have our moments. All of us, unexpectedly I suppose, say or do things that bring light into the world. Our meanness sparkles. When we stood against evil, or attended to real human needs without complaining, or found words to inspire or console, or empowered others to find themselves, we were sparkling. Of course, it's hard to be sparkling all the time and in every circumstance. And then, any sparkle of unfolding goodness naturally attracts evil, "uttering every kind of evil," as the gospel puts it. Still, I am more and more inspired by the flashes of sanctity.

My journey to sanctity goes on, however. I've come upon a type of "lives of the saints" story that attracts me even more. It was not the tales of their moral perfection, or their closeness to God, or their miracle making, or their power to stare down evil. It was the stories of official saints and holy people asked to change, asked to convert to love or mercy or peace. Saints are people who are constantly converting.

So venerate your saint or saints carefully. Don't pick any whose flaws and faults are airbrushed out. Rather, pick out those who resonate with our own flawed makeup, who do some good in the world. Pick those who rise to meet Divine Love no matter how the opportunity arises. This kind of readiness, this kind of constant conversion is the essence of sanctity. It is, perhaps, the surest safeguard against the tragedy of not becoming a saint.