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## **On Being One with the Saints in Praising God**

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We are all familiar with a refrain that echoes through many of our Christian prayers and songs, an antiphon of hope addressed to God: *Grant that we may be one with all the saints in singing your praises!*

But we have an over-pious notion of what that would look like. We picture ourselves, one day, in heaven, in a choir with Mary, Jesus' mother, with the great biblical figures of old, with the apostles and all the saints, singing praises to God, all the while feeling lucky to be there, given our moral and spiritual inferiority to these great spiritual figures. We picture ourselves spending eternity feeling grateful for having made a team whose talent level should have excluded us.

But that is a fantasy, pure and simple, mostly simple. What would it mean to be among the saints singing God's praises?

We are one with the saints in singing God's praises when we are one with them in the way we live our lives; when, like them, our lives are transparent, honest, grounded in personal integrity, with no skeletons in our closet. Being one with the saints in singing God's praises is less about singing songs in our churches than it is about living honest lives outside of them.

We are one with the saints in singing God's praises when we radiate God's wide compassion; when we, like God, let our love embrace beyond race, creed, gender, religion, ideology, and differences of every kind. We are one with the saints in praising God when our heart, like God's heart, is a house with many rooms. Being one with the saints in singing God's praises means being compassionate as God is compassionate, it means letting our sun shine on the bad as well as the good and letting our empathy embrace too those whose ideas oppose us.

We are one with the saints in singing God's praises when we tend to 'widows, orphans, and strangers', when we reach out to those most vulnerable, when we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, visit the sick and imprisoned, when we work for justice. Being one with the saints in singing God's praises means reversing nature's proclivity for the survival of the fittest and working instead to enable the opposite, the survival of the weakest.

We are one with the saints in singing God's praises when we work for peace, when in both our personal lives and our politics we strive to radiate God's non-violence, when we refuse the temptation to try to end a cruel violence by a morally superior one.

We are one with the saints in singing God's praises whenever we forgive each other, particularly when that forgiveness meets a bitterness that does not seem worthy of the gift. We are one with the saints in singing God's praises when we absorb hatred, anger, violence, and murder itself and, like Jesus, not give back in kind, when we forgive our enemies.

We are one with the saints in singing God's praises when, like them, we give away our time, talents, and our very lives in self-sacrifice without counting the cost, when we live altruistically, accepting that our own personal fulfillment is not the first aim of our lives.

We are one with the saints in singing God's praises when we live in a healthy self-effacement, when we dethrone ourselves as the center of the universe, when we take the lower place without resentment, when the conversation need no longer be about us.

We are one with the saints in singing God's praises when we are one with them in prayer, when, like them, we regularly lift our eyes upward beyond the horizon of the present world to ground ourselves in a reality beyond this world.

We are one with the saints in singing God's praises when we live in patience and endurance, when we accept without bitterness that all symphonies must remain unfinished and that we must live in inconsummation, when we live among the frustrations of this life without murmuring so that life can unfold in God's good time.

We are one with the saints in singing God's praises when we live in hope, when we ground our vision and our energies in the promise of God and in the power that God revealed in the resurrection of Jesus. We are one with the saints in singing God's praises when, like Julian of Norwich, we live in the belief that, irrespective of any present darkness, the ending of our story is already written, that in the end all will be well and every manner of being will be well.

We are one with the saints in singing God's praises when, rather than living inside of envy, resentment, bitterness, vengeance, impatience, anger, factionalism, idolatry, and sexual impatience, we live instead inside charity, joy, peace, patience, goodness, long-suffering, fidelity, mildness, and chastity.

We are one with the saints in singing God's praises only when we live our lives as they lived theirs.

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