

All Saints Sunday 2011 “Who’s a Saint?”

“Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?” (Rev. 7:13)

Given the enormous response to his life and death, I have been wondering if someone is going to nominate Steve Jobs for sainthood. He certainly was a remarkable person – creative, to say the least – who learned a lot from his illness about what it means to intentionally live the life that one has been given.

His appeal to the post-modern generations is obvious since by this work (and many of those who worked behind the scenes) many people have become connected in new ways. Sometimes, such people become “saints” simply because they are folks who are known around the world – simply by this new media we call the internet.

We tend to put our “saints” on pedestals and admire them for their perfection, usually leaving out any imperfections or weaknesses that we might observe. We all have them – even those who might be “great” in our eyes. But, for Christians, meaning in life is often found through our imperfections rather than our perfections.

Once upon a time there was king who ruled a small kingdom. It wasn't great, and it wasn't really known for any of its resources or people. But the king did have a diamond, a great perfect diamond that had been in his family for generations. He kept it on display for all to see and appreciate. People came from all over the country to admire and gaze at it.

Soon the word of it spread to neighboring countries, and more people came to look at it. The people felt that the diamond was theirs; somehow it gave them a sense of pride, of dignity, or worth. Then one day a soldier came to the king with the news that, although no one had touched the diamond, for it was guarded night and day, the diamond was cracked. The king ran to see, and sure enough there was a crack right through the middle of the diamond.

Immediately he summoned all the jewelers of the land and had them look at the diamond. One after another they examined the diamond and gave the bad news to the king: the diamond was useless; it was irredeemably flawed. The king was crushed, so were the people. Somehow they felt they had lost everything.

Then out of nowhere came an old man who claimed to be a jeweler. He asked to see the diamond. After examining, it, he looked up and confidently told the king, “I can fix it. In fact, I can make it better than it was before.” The king was shocked and bit leery. The old man said, “Give me the jewel, and in a week I'll bring it back fixed.” Now the king was not about to let the stone out of his sight even if it was ruined, so he gave the old man a room, all the tools and food and drink he needed and he waited. The whole kingdom waited. It was a long week. At the end of the week the old man appeared with the stone in his hand and gave it to the king. The king couldn't believe his eyes. It was magnificent. The old man had used the crack that ran through the middle of the stone as a stem and carved an intricate, full-blown rose, leaves, and thorns into the diamond. It was exquisite.

The king was overjoyed and offered the old man half his kingdom. He had taken something beautiful and perfect and improved upon it! But the old man refused in front of everyone, saying, “I didn't do that at all. What I did was to take something flawed and cracked at its heart and turn it into something beautiful.”ⁱ

Throughout Holy Scripture, in both the Hebrew and Christian texts, saints are those who are “set apart”, “holy”, special to God. St. Paul took the term and applied to all the baptized because baptism sets us apart, makes us holy, consecrates us to the One, Holy, and Living God of Abraham, Isaac and Joseph, the God of Moses and Jesus of Nazareth who shows us the way to this holiness.

Matthew, who is the consummate educated Jew, organizes his Gospel like the Torah. The Fifth chapter through 6th chapters contain the essential teachings of Jesus that we call the “Sermon on the Mount”. Like Moses, Jesus goes up a mountain. But instead of bringing the teaching down on tablets, it comes from his mouth – the Word of God spoken instead of written, and the law is phrased differently. Jesus pronounces blessing, goodness, happiness upon that which appears to be flawed, unacceptable, or perhaps undesirable, difficult to do or be: the poor, the downtrodden, the mourners, the meek, those who hunger for justice, the merciful, peacemakers, those who are pure in heart (innocent and open), those who are persecuted. Jesus tells us that God takes his creation which from the very beginning is “good”, but has somehow become flawed, cracked at the heart of its intention to be love. God takes the flawed diamond of humanity, lifts us to the skies, blesses us and makes something ever more beautiful, radiant and striking to behold.

Most of us would not consider ourselves to be saints, certainly not with a capital “S”. Perhaps we would admit to the small “s” of baptism, but not to that place that is for those who are “set apart”. We are too broken, too imperfect, too unable.

It is upon this brokenness that God pronounces blessing, and that the joy and life of God is formed and shaped in and among us. We only have to say “yes”! Like the skeptical king, who didn’t want to entrust his diamond to the jeweler, we are invited to join the saints among and before us in allowing God to take our flaws and form us into a prism of blessing for the world.

And even if we didn’t see the imperfections in Steve Jobs, I am sure that they were there. Perhaps, in his continuing journey God has made him a saint as well.

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ⁱ *Parables: The Arrows of God* by Megan McKenna, p.3