

# SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

*Fifth Avenue · New York City*

**Sunday, November 02, 2025**  
All Saints' Sunday

**Solemn Evensong**  
4:00 pm

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A Sermon by  
The Rev. Matthew Moretz

on  
Revelation 19:1, 4-10

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## All Saints

Beloved in Christ, today we are celebrating the saints, all of them. And I do not mean spiritual celebrities. I do not mean the smooth, untouchable figures in stained glass, the versions of the saints where they already look finished and safe. I mean the people they actually were, in flesh and blood, in fear and decision, the people without whom the Church would have fallen down.

In the Book of Revelation we are given this vast, thundering picture. We hear, “a great voice of much people in heaven... as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings,” crying out Alleluia, because “the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” We are told of the marriage of the Lamb, Christ united to his people, and of the Bride “arrayed in fine linen, clean and white,” and then we are told exactly what that linen is: “the righteousness of saints.” This vision is not a quite or private one. It is the image of the whole Creation saying yes to God.

Now the saints in that vision are not there because they get more of God than you will get. No soul in glory receives a larger portion of God than any other. As the song goes, “Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.” That blessing is spoken to all who are invited, not just a select few. The angel even says to John, “See thou do it not... I am thy fellowservant.” The saints are not a different species. They are fellowservants. They eat at the same table.

So why do we call some of them saints in a special sense and put their names in calendars and carve them in stone?

Because sainthood is all about biography, specifically spiritual biography that can benefit many many others.

A saint is someone whose life, looked at all the way through, can carry weight. Not just in their own little circle, not just for their one church in their one decade, but for the whole Church across place and across time. We wait until they die because only then can we see the shape of the whole story. We can ask: did this life, taken as a whole, help the people of God stand? Can the rest of us safely lean on it? Can teenagers

lean on it? Can the poor lean on it? Can people in danger lean on it? Can people 500 years from now lean on it?

If the answer is yes, then that life becomes part of the structure. One more brick in the wall that will stand for our benefit until kingdom come. This is not about perfection. This is about load-bearing faithfulness.

Think of the Church like the Ship of Theseus. The old story goes like this: a ship sets out on a long, long voyage. Waves break, storms hit, the planks rot, the ropes fray. Slowly, piece by piece, every part is replaced. Centuries later, not one board is original. The question is: is it still the same ship?

Well, if you only look at the parts, you'll say no. This mast is new. This hull is new. Nothing is left of the first day. But if you look at the journey, the purpose, the holding-together across time, then yes, it is the same ship. It has been one four-dimensional thing: one life, stretched through time, with a beginning and an end.

The Church is this ship.

The buildings change. The music changes. The languages, the arguments, even the scandals and repairs, all of it changes. And each of us will be replaced. Every priest, every choir, every usher, every treasurer, every parishioner, swapped out plank by plank, generation by generation. But the Church is not just the parts. The Church is the Spirit that carries the journey through time.

And this is where the saints come in. You do not get a Church that survives for two thousand years just by having stone walls that last. You get a Church that survives because certain human lives last. Certain lives don't crumble under our feet. They hold.

Saint Alban is one of those lives. Roman Britain, probably around the early 4th century. Alban is not a bishop, not a professor, not wearing a collar. He is simply a man who shelters a Christian priest who is being hunted. And in that sheltering, Alban is changed. He is converted to Christ, and when the soldiers come, he puts on the priest's cloak and surrenders in the priest's place. They take him to die. That alone would be courage enough.

But listen. As they lead him out of the city to be executed, there is, according to the earliest written account, a sign from God: the crowd is so great that they cannot cross the river, and the waters themselves make a way for Alban and the guards. The assigned executioner sees this, and, Bede says, being 'moved by divine inspiration,' throws down his sword at Alban's feet. He refuses to kill him. He asks instead to die with Alban, or even to die in his place.

So they bring in a second executioner. And that man does the beheading. And the tradition says that in the very act of killing Alban, the second executioner's eyes fall out as a sign of judgment.

This is what I mean when I say sainthood is biography. A human life that, in one moment, is so aligned with Christ that it turns even the machinery of death against itself.

That is sainthood. Not an idea. A moment in which violence itself forgets how to be violence. A moment that breaks the chain of "I have to kill you because that's justice." The Church did not make that up later. That is biography. We have that story because somebody saw it happen and could not forget.

Saint Cecilia is another. In the Church's earliest stories about her, Cecilia is condemned in Rome by a prefect there for refusing to renounce Christ. His men seal her in an overheated bath in her own house,

trying to kill her by suffocation in the steam rather than by public execution. When that fails and she is still alive, they send an executioner to behead her.

According to that same early account, Cecilia does not use those last hours for rage or bargaining. She uses them for witness. She prays aloud. She praises Christ in honest and earnest song. She urges the people around her to stay faithful. She even directs that her home be given over to the Church so that worship can continue there after she is gone.

This is why the Church remembers her as the patron of music: not because she had a nice voice at a recital, but because she would not stop offering praise to God while she was being killed. Her dying becomes public worship. Her body itself becomes a place of worship.

Again, this is not just an idea. This is a human body in history choosing beauty, choosing praise, in the middle of state cruelty.

These lives are now part of the ship. They are built into the ribs of it, even when the parts get replaced. Their story becomes something the rest of us can lean on. When you are afraid, you can lean on Cecilia. When you are furious and you want payback and you call it righteousness, you can lean on Alban. You can let the sword fall out of your own hand.

Now, here is something that might bother you a little. There is some chance in this. There is a way in which sainthood is also timing. Your gifts have to meet the world's wounds in a particular moment. You could be as brave as Cecilia, but if the world never sees it, the Church may never name you. That is true. No one can guarantee recognition.

But know this: God can save a whole people with one saint. One person whose life bears enough weight can keep the Church from sinking in their generation. God has done it before. And God will continue to do it. And so we celebrate saints past, saints present, and saints to come. All of them.

So where does that leave you? leaves you with Mr. Rogers.

He sings:

*If you can't be pine on the top of a hill  
Be a shrub in the valley but be  
The best little shrub by the side of a rill  
If you can't be a wood be a tree*

*If you can't be a highway then just be a trail  
If you can't be the sun be a star  
It isn't by size that you win or you fail  
Be the best of whatever you are  
Be the best of whatever you are*

Holiness is humility. Not trying to be bigger than you are. Not trying to be smaller than you are. If you pretend to be less than God made you, you deprive the Church of the support your life was meant to give.

And if you pretend to be more than God made you, if you try to carry ten lives' worth of weight when you were built to carry three, you will crack, and you will drop people. Both are life-sized disasters.

The saints are not saints because they were loud. They are saints because they let themselves be exactly the size God made them to be. Alban, exactly Alban-sized. Cecilia, exactly Cecilia-sized. Not posturing. Not pretending to be less. Not pretending to be more. Simply faithful, and entirely spent.

And that is the humility we are given to practice. You do not have to be the sun. You do not have to be a cathedral. But you are not allowed to be nothing. You are asked to be the star you are, the brick you are, the bit of the ship that does not give way.

So the question is not, Will you be famous when you're dead. The question is something quieter and heavier: Will your life hold. Will it bear weight. Will someone who comes after you be able to stand where you stood, lean where you leaned, and not fall.

Because that, in the end, is what God uses to keep the Church from sinking.

Amen.

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