

### True saints and Christian festivals

Orthodox Christianity has a particular concept of a saint at its heart. But the actual Bible meaning has been lost over the ages. The original meaning of the word “saint” is “one who is separate” or “called out.” All those who are called out to be faithful to the Gospel message are holy and hence saints. So let us look at a few Bible examples of how the word is used; Acts 9:32.

*And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.*

This is about an event on one of Peter’s journeys in Judea where he came to a small village called Lydda and where he found some saints. These were people who had separated themselves from the mainstream of Judaism to become followers of the Gospel message.

Again in Ephesians 1:1.

*Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:*

The Apostle Paul addressed this letter to the saints at Ephesus. These, again, were those who had separated themselves from the religion of the city to follow the Gospel message. If we continue to look through the rest of the New Testament, we find a continuing theme in the letters to the Romans, to the Corinthians, to the Philippians, and other New Testament books.

So where did the practice of “canonising” people into “saints” originate?

It began in the second or third centuries to honour those who had been martyred for the message of the Gospel, but not to worship them. However as the early church drifted away from the doctrines and practices of the Apostles, canonisation took on veneration. Today, the Roman Church recognises over 10,000 canonised “saints”.

Some of these saints were given a special day in the year for people to venerate them, but with so many saints on the list, there were not enough days to go around, so “All Saints day” was created. This became known as “all Hallows day” or “Halloween”. It has its roots in pagan cultures where the honouring of dead relatives was performed. This was transferred to the Christian churches in medieval times.

Just as the Halloween festival originated in paganism, so do the festivals of the Christian calendar. Christmas has nothing to do with the birth of Christ. In all probability he would have been born between June and September; but the day itself is really unimportant. The important thing is that God sent His son into the world, born of a woman, born under the Law of Moses to carry out God’s will. Christmas was originally the celebration of the northern winter solstice at the time when day light started to become longer and was never the time of the birth of Jesus.

The Easter festival likewise is pagan in origin. It originated in fertility rites to pagan deities and the northern Spring equinox. The fact that this fell close to the Jewish Passover feast allowed it to transfer easily to Christianity. Jesus did die at the time of the Jewish Passover, but that does not mean we should celebrate that time above other times.

There is only one true festival endorsed by Jesus and the Apostles. This is referred to in parts of the New Testament as the “breaking of bread”. Acts 2:42.

*And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

This originated in the Last Supper, celebrated by Jesus and his Apostles as recorded in Matthew 26, Mark 14 and Luke 22. All record very similar things. Matthew 26:26-28.

*And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*

The first century believers often came together on the first day of the week (Sunday) each week to keep this festival. Acts 20:7.

*And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.*

The apostle Paul asked the believers to keep this festival, but to respect it also and keep it in the way started by Jesus and the Apostles. 1 Cor. 11:23-26.

*For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.*

This is the festival which is to be celebrated – Christ’s achievement in overcoming death by his sacrifice.