

Dear Cathy:

We read here at the abbey, the following reading by Fr Romano Guardini, a famous theologian in the Catholic Church. I think it is a fine conclusion to what I was trying to say during my LCG presentation on (June 19, 2024) on the book of Augustine Roberts. We think of the saints as only those who have been canonized but this was not the view of the early Church and it's good for us all to realize we are called to be saints whatever may be the circumstances of our lives. For this reason it may offer some fresh insight into what holiness is meant to accomplish in each of our lives so let me share it with you all.. Peace, Fr Michael

THE CHRISTIAN SAINT

From "The Faith and Modern Man" by Fr Romano Guardini⁵

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We associate the word saints with the idea of exceptional persons. In the New Testament, however, it signifies Christians generally. Being a Christian at all was extraordinary. For the Christians stood out sharply from the environment; either one lived in the Old Testament world, or in the Hellenistic-pagan world, and by both they were regarded as something strange if not hostile. The experience of conversion lifted them out of the environment. A sense of the reality of God not learned from natural religious experience or from the teaching of the Old Testament had shaken and, at the same time, blessed them. In the existence of Christ, God's countenance had been unveiled. The life of Christ had made them aware of how God is toward us. These experiences had changed their whole lives. They had acquired new ideas of God, new standards of judging the world.

The “renewal of mind” of which the Gospel speaks and which they had begun to fulfill, now consisted not only in a conversion to a good and pious life, but in a change of direction in their whole way of thinking. Thus for them “all things had become new” — and with all these “new things” they found themselves still in an old world, a world which regarded them with distrust and hostility. All this is, in itself, extraordinary — indeed the very essence of the extraordinary, and the “saint” was one who led this existence.

But the spread of Christianity and its increase in members tended to obscure its unique nature. Time went on, the Gospel grew familiar, and the sense of newness wore off. Christianity became the state religion and, as such, the official order of society. Thus the fact that being a Christian at all was in itself extraordinary faded out of people’s consciousness, and Christianity grew to be regarded as normal and usual.

By contrast, a new form of the unusual arose. Now it belonged to the idea of a special calling, a divine favor and testing, with a wearisome, dangerous way of life granted only to the few. Such tendencies had appeared in Christian antiquity as in the reverence for those who had given their lives for the Master —the martyrs — or for those who had retired into solitude to live a life of extraordinary austerity — the hermits and ascetics. But this concept of saintliness developed particularly in the Middle Ages, great human and religious forces expressing themselves in extraordinary intensification of Christian daring and achievement. Then arose also the ideas of missionaries of the Faith... masters of sacred science, mystical writers. In modern times something else came in — the Renaissance feeling for the exceptional in human life which affected the concept of the saint. With the ideas of Christian election and testing now blended that of the great man, the pioneer, the man of genius and the hero.

But the original concept of the saint was of a purely religious, of a purely spiritual character. The concept of perfection, to be sure, includes religious

perfection — all that is signified by redemption, grace, providence, God's inward working. Nevertheless...if anyone had asked Paul what constituted the holiness of the saint, he would probably have replied that it came into the world at Pentecost. The Holy Ghost is holy, and so also is the man whom the Spirit seizes. The God Who reveals Himself in Christ is holy, and so also is the man whom the Spirit brings into the kingdom of God. The saints, then, were those in whom the mystery of God held sway, in whom His providence was working to bring about God's kingdom, that is to say, those who have believed and have been baptized.

5 The Faith and Modern Man, New York 1952, 128-133.11