Today we observe All Saints Day. It is a day to remember and honor those sainted ones who have been canonized by the Church, and whose names live forever in our hearts—St. John Paul II among the most recent additions to that illustrious list. But it is also a day to call to mind the lives of lesser-known “saints”, those individuals we have known personally, deceased family and friends who have shaped our lives and faith, and who have now passed on to live with God in eternity.

We all have such a list of personal saints, great men and women of God whose character and influence continue to impact our souls today. Who are your personal saints?—a grandparent, a coach, a teacher, a priest, a friend, a parent? Do their faces, their voices, their names, spring to your mind? This would be a good week to take some time to recall their names, and thank God for the ways they have shaped your faith and life.
Which makes us pause to consider today, “Just where do saints come from, how are they made, were they even aware how much their influence meant to those around them?” Who are today’s saints-in-the-making?

It seems much easier to recognize sainthood in the apostles and popes; these remarkable holy lives, filled with courage and conviction, whose intercessions and legacy continue to work miracles in the world. It is even fairly easy to look back on the lives of our individual list of saints, and recognize unusual faithfulness and spiritual character. But what about ordinary people like you and me? Are there any saints among us? Are we on the path to be remembered by someone years from now on some future All Saints Day?

It is harder to recognize sainthood in the present, isn’t it? An old couplet said it best:

*To live above with saints we love, Oh, that will be glory!*
To live below, with saints we know, well, that’s a different story!

Sainthood isn’t a job for which you apply. There is no resume to build and submit. It is not an election to be won. It is not a title given to a winning team, a trophy given to the winner of a contest, or a diploma earned at the end of a prescribed course of study. Sainthood can only be conferred by others, and ultimately it can only be conferred by God.

It is seen best only looking back on the life and influence of a great life, lived for God. Truth is, one mark of a saint is that they have little idea, and little interest in the idea, that they might be considered a saint by anyone. Those thoughts are not their focus. A true saint is focused on God, and upon the importance of living a life shaped by the Kingdom of God. A true saint would be totally surprised that anyone considered them a saint in the first place. Saints are like true heroes in battle, who perform remarkable feats of bravery and sacrifice, but are usually humbled, surprised, and self-deprecating at medal ceremonies.
But as I said earlier, sainthood is not an election or a contest…. 

Sainthood is a matter of the heart, according to Jesus. Do morals matter, of course! Does obedience to God’s commandments matter, yes indeed! But for God, every sinner has a future, a new course of action on the other side of repentance. And the first step, the best step, is to begin that new journey with a humble heart. That is the path to sainthood. And as always, it will catch the true saint totally by surprise—but what a joyous surprise it is! So take heart, dear friends. Keep your heart and attention focused on God alone, and “let the saints go marching in.”