

Q&A

Question #1: “Fr. Alex, what is a Saint?”

Believe it or not, a saint is a sinner. Think about St. Paul, how before he was converted to Christianity, he was a brutal persecutor of Christians! And didn't St. Peter deny that he knew Jesus when Jesus was in his darkest hour and needed friends more than ever? But the difference between the average person and one who comes to live a saintly life is that the saint realizes he needs help—that he is broken. He has a turning point in life where he truly feels badly over what he's done and wants, so much, to come home. Then, he gathers the courage to ask God for help. How do we ask for help from God? We cry tears of repentance, we pray often and deeply, we receive our Sacraments (like Communion and Confession), read the Bible to be inspired by our Lord, and do good things to and for our neighbors. These things bring us closer to God. Though the person living a saintly life is always grounded by humility and conscience, he is always striving to be a better person, day by day, despite his faults and all of the challenges in his way.

Question #2:

“I have a problem with my friends of different religions in school. I use the word ‘God’ like: ‘Oh, my God,’ etc., and my friends tell me that I shouldn’t, because it is bad calling God’s name in vain. But I don’t feel I am doing wrong, since my Mom has said that it would be wrong if I make a promise in God’s name. I feel that putting God in my life means also saying His name too. Am I wrong?”

This is a deep and thoughtful question, and I certainly understand that you want to inject God into every aspect of your life—also, that you mean no harm in calling on our Lord. But let me throw something your way to think about. When we talk about “not taking the Lord’s name in vain,” what we are being warned about is making the calling of His name a common or casual thing. He is our Creator; He is awesome! Saying “Oh, my God” has become as common, these days, as saying “No way” or “Are you kidding?” We should always be careful of putting his powerful name in the same class as these casual sayings. We always want to show our Lord all reverence, love and respect; I think your friends might have a point on this one.

This also speaks to what your Mom said about not making promises in God’s name. Because we are human and often break promises, we don’t “swear to God” or make promises in God’s name. You see, humans often fall short, and we don’t want to tie God’s name to a broken promise. When we promise, we do so with humility, all honesty and with a realistic knowledge of what it means to be a struggling sinner. We pray that by God’s grace, we will find the strength to keep our promises.

Going forward, try injecting God into your vocabulary in different ways. Focus throughout the day on using the Lord’s name in such a way that full honor is given to it. If you happen to hear something that concerns you about a friend, turn that casual remark into a little prayer: “May God protect him!” If one of your friends comes and tells you

that she's in trouble with her parents and you want to show her you care, you can say something like, "Oh, my, I will pray for you tonight!"

In general, call upon our Lord—He loves you a lot and wants to talk to you—often and with great respect and love. And never let his name become common or casual!

*****Thanks to everyone for these truly thoughtful questions. They make me think more and more about my faith each month, so I'm thankful to have this little "talk" with the young people of our parish each month. Never hesitate to call, email or come see me with questions and problems.**

**Love,
Fr. Alex**