



## By All Your Saints in Warfare

**Text: Horatio Nelson (1823-1913)**

**Tune: Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)**

As the Church commemorates the saints, the blessed dead who have gone to be with Christ, certain saints stand out and for their confession and work God receives special praise. Countless hymns have been written to commemorate these saints. As we sing these hymns and give thanks to God for them, we pray that the Holy Spirit would give us the same good confession and bold courage.



An illustration of Nelson from *Vanity Fair*, April 1881

One hymn unique among hymns praising God for the saints is “By All Your Saints in Warfare.” This three-stanza hymn is useable for almost thirty separate saints days. The first and third stanzas remain the same each time, while the second stanza is unique to each saint’s day. Horatio Nelson did not write all thirty, but he wrote a bulk of them. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s hymnal, *Lutheran Service Book*, also features the work of Harlyn J. Kuschel and Gregory J. Wismar to round out the gamut of saints days.

The hymn’s primary author, Horatio Nelson (perhaps better known as Third Earl Nelson, as his uncle, also Horatio Nelson, was a famous British author during the Napoleonic Wars), was born August 7, 1823 at Burnham, Norfolk. He was educated at Eton and at Trinity College, Cambridge. He was an active layman, serving the Church in many of her religious and benevolent endeavors. In hymnody, he has taken a prominent position as compiler of the famous *Salisbury*

*Hymnbook*, assembled in 1857, at the request of the Bishop of Salisbury. He was helped by John Keble, who helped rewrite some archaic hymns and translate others from Latin. Nelson revised the *Hymnbook* in 1868, at which time it was given its more popular name, *The Sarum Hymnal*. In this revision he was aided by the Rev. J.R. Woodford (Bishop of Ely) and E.A. Dayman. The *Sarum Hymnal* was not Nelson’s only hymnal. He also published *Hymn for Saint’s Day and Other Hymns* in 1864. It is in this hymnal that his most commonly known hymn, “By All Your Saints in Warfare” was published. Nelson was also the author of other devotional works, *A Form of Family Prayer, with Special Offices for the Seasons* (1852) and *A Calendar of Lessons for Every Day* (1857). During all this work for the Church, he was married to Mary Jane Diana Agar on July 28, 1845. Their marriage was blessed with several children. Mary died in 1904, and he died February 25, 1913.

Eventually Nelson’s hymn was attached to the tune KING’S LYNN. KING’S LYNN, a traditional British melody, was harmonized by the preeminent British composer Ralph Vaughan Williams. Though Vaughan Williams composed numerous symphonies, operas, and film scores, he also did a great deal of work for the Church. He served as music editor for the *English Hymnal* (1906), which was one of the most influential hymnals of the twentieth century, and is still considered a treasure to this day. In this hymnal, he used several English folk songs as hymn tunes because he realized that these treasures of British society were being lost. Preserving them and repurposing them as hymn tunes was a way to maintain these English treasures. Sadly, despite Vaughan Williams’ great work for the Church, his second wife, Ursula Wood, described him as “an atheist...[who] later drifted into a cheerful agnosticism.”

As we sing this great hymn commemorating the saints who have made their good confession and by virtue of their faith in Christ have heard His welcome, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” may our own confession be strengthened. We do not praise the saints, but the one who has “won the battle that they might wear the crown” (st. 1). One day this crown will be ours, too, and we will join them, falling down before the throne ascribing power and glory to the Holy Trinity (st. 3).