

## SOLEMNITY OF ALL SAINTS

November 1, 2020

As I walked the streets of Rome last year on perhaps my twelfth visit to that Eternal City, I passed by numerous times, as I had on my previous visits, a magnificent classical building with, it is said, the world's widest dome, one constructed almost 1800 years ago. The emperor Hadrian had built it as a temple dedicated to all the gods, hence its name even today, Pantheon, from two Greek words meaning "all the gods." For over 1400 years, however, it has been a Catholic church. Within it today are among others the tombs of the artist, Rafael, and those of the first kings and queens of a united Italy. I have worshipped in it, and I have also had many a great meal in the many outdoor cafes that ring it. But I had never known until just recently that there is a direct connection between the Pantheon and today's Solemnity of All Saints. It was first celebrated in this church in the year 609, when Pope Boniface IV tried to quell fears that this by then long abandoned Roman temple was haunted by demons. The Pope consecrated it as a church, and dedicated it to Mary and all the saints, which it has remained to the present day. Then a little over a hundred years after that, around 735 a Pope extended this feast of All Saints to the entire Catholic Church, which is still celebrated on every November 1, even in 2020. Today we honor, and pray to, the countless throng of men, women and children, who stand before the throne of God and cry out these words, as our First Reading proclaims: SALVATION COMES FROM OUR GOD. Together with all of the saints who we are honoring today, we have been selected by our loving God, and then aided to become a member of God's eternal kingdom. Instead of having to worry, if we are good enough, smart enough, rich enough, honest enough, holy enough to deserve God's approval, we have the assurance that from the beginning -- by our baptism above all -- that God has chosen us. We must simply respond and cooperate. This is really the essence, center, and summit of the Good News that Jesus keeps telling us Sunday after Sunday, day after day. God has selected us. God has chosen us. Jesus made this perfectly clear when He told His

## SOLEMNITY OF ALL SAINTS - Siebenand - 2

disciples in St. John's Gospel, chapter 15, and continues to tell us even now: **IT WAS NOT YOU WHO CHOSE ME, BUT I WHO CHOSE YOU.**

The focus of today's celebration is on the word: **ALL**. We are *all* called to be saints. We are all chosen to be saints. We are all assisted by graces and gifts to become saints. Today we rejoice that from our beginning God's mind was made up about each one of us. God made us the only way God could have made us. God made us to be saints. God voted for us, we might well say. Now it is our responsibility, as it is for any elected politician, to live up to the confidence that God has placed in us. By our praying and by our loving service of others, we must become saintly in this life. All of us. For in God's election process for heaven we all are winners.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that God -- especially the Holy Spirit -- needs saints. It reads: **IT IS THROUGH SAINTS THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT MANIFESTS HOLINESS AND CONTINUES THE WORK OF SALVATION.** It then quotes St. Basil the Great, who wrote: **SAINTS ARE FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT A PLACE TO DWELL, AS THOUGH BEING THE SPIRIT'S OWN HOME.** The Catholic Catechism also says that while they live among us the saints give us their holy example, inspire us by their writings and help us by their prayers. And it adds that once they have gone to heaven their most exalted service is to intercede for those of us they have left behind on earth -- you and me. St. Therese of Lisieux, the "Little Flower", as she lay slowly dying for over two years before her death from tuberculosis at the age of 24 in 1897, promised that she would spend her heaven doing good on earth. Since then tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, have experienced miracles and have had their prayers answered through the intercession of St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face.

Finally, our Gospel for this Solemnity gives us perhaps the best program for our own lives in order for us to become saints ourselves: it is those truly wonderful, yet so challenging, Beatitudes. They are Christ's path and His roadway for us -- both to happiness here and now and one day to heaven.

