

All Saints Day - 1a

Rev 7:2-4, 9-14; 1 Jn 3:1-3; Mt 5:1-12a

Imagine that you are going to a wedding, or even a family anniversary or birthday party. We have all had that experience of walking into a room filled with family who may not all have met each other. You might not recognize all the people at the gathering, but you know that you share a common history, and a common connection to the honored guest that you are there to celebrate. In the first reading we hear about a great gathering of white robed figures who stand before the throne of God in heaven. Who are all these people? Actually, they're all your long-lost relatives that you didn't even know you had.

The second reading reminds us: *We are God's children now, what we shall be has not yet come to light. When it is revealed we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is.* These white-robed figures are the saints. Today we celebrate the countless other unknown saints who have died and now see God face to face. Their number continues to grow as people die and go to heaven, or as souls in purgatory complete their final cleansing and enter into heaven as saints. Tomorrow on the feast of All Souls, we will commemorate and pray for these souls in Purgatory who have not yet reached the heavenly banquet. The saints do not stop being members of the Church, nor do the souls in purgatory. As members of the one Church we (the Church on earth, and the members of the Church in purgatory and those in heaven) pray with each other to God, and we pray for each other. St. Cyprian of Carthage said: "Let us remember one another ... Let us on both sides [of death] always pray for one another."

People sometimes ask: "Why do Catholics pray to the saints? Isn't it good enough to pray to God directly?" We can and do pray to God directly, but there are some important reasons that we can also involve the saints in our prayer to God: (1) The saints are now close to God and because they see him *as he is* understand what is God's mind and will - they can help to offer our prayers to God according to God's will and for our true best interests. St. Paul reminds us that sometimes we just don't know the best way to approach God for what we need. Imagine a teen asking his parent to borrow the car, and they say no. But a wise older sibling - who knows the parents well - might suggest them that if little brother is allowed to use the car he could get back home earlier and do his homework. This way of asking the request is more likely to get a

positive response from the parent - and, by the way, looks out for the other's best interests and helps keep priorities straight. Saints are Translators.

(2) The saints are still members of the Church. All members of the Church have a mission for the good of all, the saints in heaven also have to have a mission (like being patron saint of ... X). They may not be able to volunteer at the soup kitchen, or care for the sick, or raise children, but they can pray. Jesus is the one true mediator with the Father, and the saints don't take his place. We and the saints in heaven are part of Jesus' Body and share in Jesus' role as intercessor. In Revelation 5:8, the saints are depicted as offering our prayers to God under the form of "golden bowls full of incense." Jesus prays to the father through his Body the Church whether they are members of that body on earth or in heaven. Saints are Intercessors.

(3) God is so mysterious and so far beyond us; the saints give us an assortment of human faces and persons to connect to - fellow Christians who are like us and who struggled as we do. Since they are still existing, they can be friends to come with us before the throne of God to support us when we pray. Sometimes, such a human person with a story, such an example, helps us understand. We do walk the way to heaven with Jesus, and he is the ultimate bridge between the Divine and Humans - yet we are not so perfect as Jesus, not divine like Jesus, not so powerful and strong as Jesus, we can have comfort that the saints were like us, they can support us, and can show us how to walk with Jesus to the Father. Saints are Friends.

There is only one God, we don't "worship" the saints, and they have no actual power to do anything - all power comes from God. Yet, the practice of praying to the saints dates from the earliest days of Christianity and the majority of Christians in the world have such a belief as part of their faith system. These are the models of faith who can be likened to the *clean of heart* in the Gospel who now *see God* face to face. The more we strive to be like them and use them to help us connect with God as our Translators, Intercessors, and Friends - the more we can hope hear the words from the Gospel: *Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.*