

The Great Distress

All Saints Day

November 1, 2020

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This time of pandemic has been a great trial for many of us- social isolation, getting angry about how other people are handling or are not handling the safety policies, being anxious about when this will end, and unfortunately for some, losing a loved one due to the virus. Anytime there is a crisis like this, it is easy to give up on community. It is easy to turn inward and just look out for ourselves and our own interests.

Today, we celebrate All Saints Day. It is important to recall that our doctrine on the saints is officially called ‘the communion of saints.’ The saints are the ones who desired to be part of a community. While on earth, they wanted to be part of the church community. Looking forward to heaven, they wanted to be part of the “great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue.” Nothing, not even a crisis, took them away from this desire. “These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress,” John writes in the book of Revelation. Now, they are forever part of the eternal community in heaven.

Applying this to our own time and our own situation, we could see this pandemic, this time of great distress, as an opportunity to imitate the communion of saints in our desire for community. In his latest document, *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis cautions us against the opposite. He writes, “once this health crisis passes, our worst response would be to plunge even more deeply into feverish consumerism and new forms of egotistic self-preservation.” (35) Implied in his comment

is that our pre-covid world wasn't entirely healthy. As a whole, we have been too materialistic and selfish, both of which could get worse during and after this time of social isolation if we are not careful. The pope continues, "the notion of 'every man for himself' will rapidly degenerate into a free-for-all that would prove worse than any pandemic." (36) We hope this doesn't happen.

Following Pope Francis' leadership and guidance, we can use this moment to reaffirm our desire for community and not let this time of great distress ruin us. We can survive this and our generations have the chance to be co-creators of a new normal, one where everyone is included. We can build a community where every nation, race, people, and tongue are appreciated. We can build a community where power, wealth, and selfishness take a back seat and the Gospel values of being poor in spirit, meek and humble, hungering and thirsting for justice, and working for peace come to the front. Let us not miss this opportunity.

The saints are the ones who affirmed community and made it through times of great distress.

As Christians, we believe that good can come from evil and new life out of death. Even though this pandemic is far from over, let us begin to ask ourselves, 'what good will come out of this pandemic?' and 'what part can I play in the reconstruction of society?'

Today, as we are still experiencing great distress, let us look to the saints for inspiration. Like them, may we not waiver in our desire for community.