

November 3, 2019 The Prayers Of A Saint Homily: “When I die, I will send down a shower of roses from heaven. I will spend my heaven by doing good on earth.” (St. Therese of Lisieux)

Recently, while on my annual retreat in Massachusetts, I read the text of a conference given by Father Eugene Boylan, a Cistercian monk and a native of Ireland, to a gathering of his fellow monks many years ago. Father Boylan died in 1963. Reflecting on the law of charity, he suggested that the Sixteenth Century English monarch, Queen Elizabeth the first, is probably in heaven. His words must have stunned his listeners. Elizabeth subjected the Catholics of her realm to unspeakably cruel persecution and martyrdom. In England, she was the scourge of the Roman Catholic Church. So his explanation deserves our consideration.

“Nobody who has martyred so many people could possibly go to hell. Why? Those martyred by her have prayed for her. This is an example of the way God works. I am taking her as an example of a persecutor of the Church. You will see that God glorifies Himself by making these people saints. THEY CANNOT GET INTO HEAVEN UNLESS THROUGH THE PRAYERS OF THOSE THEY PERSECUTED. Just as the Lord himself dying on the cross prayed for the people who persecuted him, so the martyrs prayed for those who subjected them to death. Well, if God will not hear the prayers of a dying martyr, who is he going to hear?”

Today the church celebrates the Feast of All Saints. This solemn day in the church’s liturgical calendar reminds us that the sole reason for being a Christian is to be a saint. We are called to holiness. Quite simply, that is our vocation. “For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thes. 4:3), writes St. Paul. Their great example inspires us to follow in their footsteps. If only because they are members of the Body of Christ, we share a special bond with the faithful departed. They are truly our friends.

What we have in common with the saints is a desire to pray for those in need. As part of Catholic devotion we speak of invoking or “praying to” the saints “On whose constant intercession we rely for help” (Eucharistic prayer #3). We do not invoke the saints in the same way we call upon God. We ask for their prayers the way we would ask the prayers of anyone else in our family. Through the witness of Sacred Scripture we learn of the saint’s intercessory power before the throne of God. In his vision of Heaven, St John the Evangelist saw four living creatures “With golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of saints”. (Rev.5:6) The Letter to the Hebrews tells us that the saints in glory take an active interest in our lives on earth; they surround us as a great “cloud of witnesses”. (Heb.12:1)

As Christians, we “share the lot of the saints in light”. (Col.1:12) If the sun is an image of Christ, the Light of the world, then his disciples are the image of the moon, which has no light of its own but shines with a brightness that comes from the sun. Surely, it is no coincidence that the saint is depicted with a ring of light, a halo, above his head. Being a saint means being close to God.

For the Christian, earth represents the journey of history while heaven (or eternity), the fullness of life in God. We are on a journey. Our destination is heaven. The reunion of all those who have gone before us will be sweet indeed.

In closing, I should like to advert to a popular song "When the Saints Go Marching In". The words are fitting for today's feast. "Oh, when the saints come marching in, oh how I want to be in that number." The Church traditionally remembers the dead during the month of November. Let us bear in mind that many who were close and dear to us in this life are praying for us in the next one.

Amen!