

**November 1, 2020 When the Saints Go Marching In Homily:** Monsignor Ronald Knox was arguably one of the finest preachers of the Christian faith in the last century. A convert to the Catholic faith, he distinguished himself as an outstanding biblical scholar and was the author of many popular books on Christian spirituality. Not surprisingly, he was much in demand as a leader of retreats. On the first day of November in the year 1950, the Feast of All Saints, Knox preached in the boys' chapel at the All Hallows School in Somerset, England. He told the boys that over a period of time, the meaning of words often change.

He asked them to consider the word "saint".

He pointed out that in the earliest days of the Church it was the fashion to describe all Christian people as "saints". In Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, the apostle addressed "those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name Jesus." That was not true in the middle of the last century. He said to the young students, "If your mother were to send a letter to "Saint John Smith" or whatever your name happens to be, the headmaster would probably return it to the Post Office, with the comment, "not known here".

Nowadays it is not uncommon for those who have no relationship to Christ or the church to be called "saints." If, for example, a deceased person was a philanthropist in life but not identified as a Christian, he might be declared a secular saint.

If a foreigner were to meet a football player from New Orleans and told that he played for the "Saints", he'd likely be confused.

After Pope Francis spoke the words, "Who am I to judge?" on the issue of homosexuality, the recording artist, Elton John said of him, "That man is a saint". Well, in order to be a canonized saint, one must first be dead!

So, who are the saints?

First, they are those who are perfectly united to Christ;

Second, they are those who have responded enthusiastically to the call of holiness, which is the goal of Christian life. Holiness is the vocation of every baptized person. Saint Paul writes, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification."

Third, they are those who conform themselves to the Will of God and put into practice the Lord's teaching, especially the Beatitudes, the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy and the two great commandments, love of God and love of neighbor.

If the church is holy it is only because she is the Body of Christ. In the saints, says Saint Ambrose, the Church is beautiful.

As an illustration, let me quote an anecdote found in father Gabriel Quicke's book "*Come Love With Me: Augustine as Spiritual Guide*".

“There is an old story, dating back to the final days of the Second World War. While removing debris, an American soldier found a large damaged image of the crucified Christ. As much as he searched he could not find the arms. Tired of searching, he sat down and looked at the crucifix, almost with pity. People passed, Germans, old women, children in rags, who were depressed, anxious, or even maimed. He dared not look at them. He thought to himself, do they have to go on living that way? Who would ever love and heal them? Who would ever repair their homes? As he kept his eyes fixed on the helpless Christ, he saw the lips of the Crucified One moving and heard him say, “I have no hands but yours.....”. This is the core truth: Christ knows firsthand how people suffer and that they need help.”

The saints are members of the body of Christ and the Church triumphant. In the words of Monsignor Knox, “The saints are the living advertisement of the faith they professed.”

Each one of us treasures a memory of some holy person who has helped us grow in faith and made us feel the goodness and closeness of God. Recently our parish suffered the loss of beloved Father Vaughan, whose influence on so many of our parishioners was immeasurable. Undoubtedly, he prays for us now.

In the face of death, one of life’s greatest mysteries, we each have a yearning to be reunited with our loved ones on the other side of our mortal life. My dear mother died in December of 2012. So if I desire heaven it is partly because I want to see my mother again and all those dear to me in this life who have passed over from this life to the other shore, which is eternity.

Perhaps you are familiar with a popular song that can be heard especially in New Orleans around the time of the Mardi Gras celebration... *“When the Saints go Marching In.”* The words are noteworthy. “Oh when the Saints go marching in. Lord, how I want to be in that number.”

As Roman Catholics, we venerate the saints, honor their memory, and plead for their prayers of intercession. Even death cannot break the bond of friendship we enjoy with them.

In his vision, the author of the Book of Revelation writes, “I had a vision of a great multitude which no one could count from every nation, race people and tongue.” Let us pray that after our earthly days are completed, we may be among their number.

Amen!