

**Fr Dispin John – Homily All Saints Day 31st Sunday Ordinary Time 1/11/2020 St John’s Mitcham**

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People often ask me, these days, you know, how's the situation in India. With about 1.3 plus billion people, India's COVID situation is pretty bad. Although the political leaders would not acknowledge it.

They are not doing do much, when people are dying. They couldn't care less because they have other important things to do. Like in the midst of this pandemic, building a temple for the Hindu God Ram, the Lord Ram.

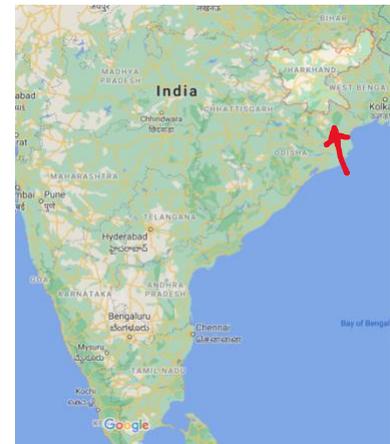


In the midst of this, something else happened that really affected me in many ways. In one of those coincidences, under a very fundamentalist regime in India, an 83 year old Catholic priest, a Jesuit priest Father Stan Swami, was arrested by India's high profile national investigation agency. An 83 year old man arrested and being taken in this pandemic time. And what was his crime? Liberating people.



Now Father Stan Swami, as I said, a Jesuit priest, the same religious order that Pope

Francis belonged to, had been an activist priest, protecting the lives and the rights of the Adivasis, meaning the original or the ancient people of India, in the Eastern state of Jharkhand. For 50 years, he lived with them, lived for them. He fought with them, fought for them. He gave his life. He



fought against the unlawful arrest and detention of the tribal people. He helped them protect the natural resources of the forests and mountains, which is one of the reasons he was arrested. Amidst all of this, just before being arrested, he sent a video to his friends saying, "I think I will be arrested".

As we celebrate this All Saints Day, another person came to my mind. A mother who lost her husband. She had to carry fish loaded in a bucket on her head and go and sell the fish to fend for her family. And she did that with a lot of joy. Raised two of her children, and indeed, helped raise two grandchildren and died recently.



Holiness is not something reserved for very special people. Holiness and sainthood are not very rare. It's in fact, the ordinary people who give life to the message and the mission of Christ it who matter. And it is those people who attain sainthood, not only hereafter, but here and now. It is that sense of living the mission of Christ in wherever you are, whatever circumstances you are in. And then that mission, giving life, is sainthood.

When we celebrate this great feast, we realize that we are surrounded by saints every day. Like when, in the gospel, when Matthew writes the Beatitudes, Jesus is addressing ordinary people, everyday people, the gentle, the persecuted, the mourners, the people who are marginalized, who have no voices, the disadvantaged and the threatened. It is these people that Jesus is bringing forth and calling them, "Blessed are you". He doesn't say, "Blessed are you the lawyers, the educated, the special". He calls the simple people to be saints. "Blessed are you. Holy are you. Happy are you."

In the first reading, Tom read for us, it can be called the apocalyptic literature and is not to be taken literally like, you know, 144,000 people. If that's the number of people in heaven, and I think I'll miss out on that one, I may be 144,000 plus one, just one too late. It's not to be taken literally.

It's about the multitude of people that gather in the presence of God in heaven. That includes all of us. The multitude of people include those who struggle. Those whose lives are at risk. Those who live very simple, ordinary lives, doing their things for their family. Those who care for others. Those who are looking after those who are dependent on them. Those who struggle yet, despite their struggles, bring happiness to other people. Those who sin and recognize God's amazing mercy. Those who have lived in poverty and realize that God has the richness to lift them up. They include you and me.

In fact, when in the apocalyptic literature that the Revelation was written, in some places it looks very scary. The kind of things that we hear, they are not meant to scare us. In fact, they are meant to be a hope filled message for us because when John writes this, he's writing to a persecuted people whose lives are at risk. And John tells them no matter how desperate your lives are, no matter how much you're struggling, no matter how much you're persecuted, remember God is with you. God is struggling with you. God is walking with you. We can sometimes let fear determine who we are. And fear is a very strong thing that can influence our lives. Fear, doubt, scepticism and anger can easily sway us. But sainthood is all about "let the fear subside and let the Lord take over." Sainthood, I believe is when we choose, despite all that we experience, sainthood is when we choose to put the Lord at the centre of our lives and giving hope one more opportunity.

So, it seems like it is actually easy to live the life of a Saint. All of us are called to be saints. Sometimes we can be like Saint Augustine, who said: "Well, I live a wild life." And then towards the end: "I live a better life". But Augustine, when he comes to recognize that moment of God, he says: "Why did I waste my all my life without you? My God."

And tomorrow, the 2nd of November, we will be celebrating All Souls Day. And it is, once again, an opportunity to remember those who have loved us. Those who have lived with us. Those who led great saintly lives in being father, mother, brother, sister, friend. And their lives are also saintly.

So, let's remember to live a saintly life and recognize the saints in us and in others, so that we can all travel together towards the kingdom of God, only with hope and the light of Christ guiding us.

Happy All Saints Day.