

Solemnity of All Saints/Sisters of St. Joseph

November 1, 2018 9:30 a.m. Holy Family Chapel/Motherhouse

Dear Sisters: it's so good to be here with you on this special day in which we correctly wish one another: "Happy Feast Day!" Yesterday's observance of Halloween, today's Feast of All Saints, and tomorrow's Commemoration of all the Faithful Departed, are all what some ethnic groups refer to as the "Celebration of the Days of the Dead", but not in any somber or morose way, but in a spirit of hope and confidence as people who profess belief in God's promise for eternal life. Why, because we are those who, as we sang in today's Psalm Response: "*Lord, this is the people who long to see Your Face.*"

Throughout our Liturgical Year, we celebrate Feasts of some of the more well-known Saints--those canonized; those formally acknowledged by the Church to have lived lives of heroic holiness in this life and now, the Church formally proclaims, are indeed living eternal life in Heaven.

Just two weeks ago, Pope Francis canonized seven new Saints, two of them well known to us: Saint Pope Paul VI and Saint Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador. But in addition, there were five others canonized at that time---two religious women/founders of a German and a Spanish religious community, two Italian priests, and one 17-year-old lay person. We know that the canonization process is rigorous; it can take a very long time, and usually, a miracle or two must be attributed to the Saint's intercession. These become Saints, with a capital "S".

But they have their own special feast days to celebrate them. Today we are focused on celebrating all those other holy women and men who lived their lives with heroic holiness in their normal, everyday lives. The ones who, along with the Saints with the capital "S", are counted among the Communion of Saints---those that we know are in Heaven because perhaps we were inspired by, recipients of, and witnessed in person the way they faithfully and joyfully lived the Beatitudes.

That's what Jesus was teaching us as the very Preface to His Sermon on the Mount; in fact, the Beatitudes are really the Preamble to His entire Gospel. What does it mean to be a Follower of Jesus? What does it mean to live a life of holiness? What does it mean to be a part of the Kingdom of God? The answer is to live our lives according to the Beatitudes.

I'm pretty sure I've read and prayed over this 5th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel 1,000 times, as you all have as well. But in doing that again this year, preparing for this reflection, something stuck out at me in a new way. The Beatitudes tell us that when we live with one of the particular spiritual qualities or virtues that Jesus is holding up for us---those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the clean of heart, the peacemakers----then, there **will be** a corresponding effect: will be comforted, will inherit the land, will be satisfied, will be shown mercy, will see God, will be called children of God. But the first and the last Beatitude----those who are poor in spirit, and those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness----their corresponding effect is now--- right away----and that "effect" is to be "*in the Kingdom of Heaven*". We are already living lives of holiness when we have that poverty of spirit---that sense of oneness with the poor; similarly when we are persecuted, made fun of, pressured, excluded, harassed, just for doing what's right, just, true, and good----well, again, we are already living in the Kingdom of God.

The other Beatitudes are helping us to make God's Kingdom here in this world more clearly seen, and helping to transform the culture of the world around us. And both of them go hand in hand.

All the Saints in Heaven----especially those with small "s"s----lived the Beatitudes faithfully and joyfully, and advanced the Kingdom of God by living IN the Kingdom of God.

As we're all too aware, we're living in some pretty rough times these days. In the Church---nationally and universally----we've been dealing with the sexual abuse scandals, and all the awful effects of those scandals: anger and confusion on the part of so many of the Faithful, loss of faith for many for whom these revelations are just too disturbing. Locally, here in our Diocese and the other dioceses of Michigan, we know that there is an ongoing investigation by the State Attorney General's office into allegations of clergy sexual abuse going back as far as 1950. And of course, as you may have heard on the news yesterday, we are dealing with some alleged issues of financial impropriety on the part of one of our priests.

In our society, our country could not be more divided. People are so busy screaming at one another, and no one is listening. We're so busy pointing all how awful the "other side" is, and the divisions are getting deeper and more volatile.

On top of all of that, on Saturday, we were all horrified by a violent attack and the murder of 11 innocent Jews and Police officers during a worship service in the *Tree of Life Synagogue* in my beloved hometown of Pittsburgh in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood of that great city.

All of that might cause us to have a sense of despair, or discouragement. But then we need to look a little deeper and beyond the "headlines"

There have been so many natural disasters around the country, and the world: hurricanes, flooding and wildfires. Beyond the death and destruction, look at the First Responders; look at neighbors helping neighbors. Look at how people are supporting the "victims" long after the "headlines" are gone and media's attention is put someplace else.

Or look closer at that hate crime in Pittsburgh. The entire City of Pittsburgh has come together, people helping people, divisions put aside to come to give comfort; praises all around for the Police who did such a great job stopping this from being an even worse tragedy, and those who came to provide medical service and emotional support. We all love the famous Mr. Rodgers. Before he died, Mr. Rodgers lived and worked in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood. He was quoted for a time some years ago in talking to children as he was trying to explain to them how to cope with another terrible tragedy that had taken place, when he said: When you see times of trouble, look beyond the trouble, and look for the "helpers". That's when you know that the trouble will be dealt with, and you'll be OK.

And let's think about one more positive example, right here in Kalamazoo. This past Saturday the *KUDOS* event took place, which means: *Kalamazoo United Day of Service*. This was an occasion for Christians to come together---Protestants and Catholics alike---to have a day of unity through acts of charity and works of mercy for those in need in our community. This was a true demonstration of unity, even in the midst of what divides us in the tenets of our Christian religions. We are One in the Lord, and we are united in the Body of Christ.

Today we celebrate all the Saints today, those with the small "s". They have lived heroic lives of love and service, and they have professed belief in Jesus as their Lord.

Let's just look at those people we meet today, and in the days to come; let's just look around us here in this Chapel. Who are they/who are we? We are "saints", with small "s", in the making. We are trying to allow God to do His work through us. As St. John reminds us in today's Second Reading, while we know who we are now, we don't know for sure who we will be in the life to come; that still needs to be revealed. But we know that we are "*children of God*". We are those trying to live the Beatitudes, and thereby, trying to help build God's Kingdom here among us. We are the "helpers", those who help to live, and give witness to, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And so, let us "*rejoice and be glad; our reward will be great in Heaven.*"

God bless you, now and always!