

November 1, 2020

11:30 a.m.

St. Augustine/Crowley Center

Solemnity of All Saints

Of all the Holydays throughout the year, this one might be the favorite of many of us because, in a sense, it's one that's really all about us! Many of the other special Feasts that we celebrate throughout the year focus on the Dogmas of our Faith, or a special, very important Event: like Christmas; Easter; or the Immaculate Conception. But this Feast of All Saints is our Feast day----it's a day when we can rightly say to one another: "Happy Feast Day"! Because we are celebrating normal, ordinary, human beings; people from every walk of life, people of all ages, people at every point along the spectrum of poor to rich/ignorant to educated; people who have lived and died in this world from the beginning of time. As today's First Reading from the Book of Revelation put it: *"there was a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation, race, people and tongue."*

The common denominator among "All the Saints" is that they chose, with varying degrees of success, to live lives that were good, honest, true and virtuous --- what we would call "holy". They might not have seen their lives as "holy", but God did.

Today is the central Feast of the three special days we're in the midst of: yesterday's celebration of "All hallowed Even"; today's celebration of All Saints; and tomorrow's Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed, more commonly known as "All Souls' Day". And for those of Hispanic heritage, these days are celebrated with special festivity and respect as "Dia de los Muertos"----the Day of the Dead, but they celebrate their "departed" family members as still very much with them, and in these days, they celebrate and revere their loved ones who have gone on to be with God. And that, we hope of course, is true for all our departed loved ones.

This Feast, along with tomorrow's Feast of All Souls, will eventually include all of us, after our life on earth is completed. While thinking about our own death, or the death of any of our loved ones, is not a happy thought, it shouldn't be something we see as morose. Death is truly a significant part of Life. But as People of Faith, and as those who profess belief in God's Promise of Eternal Life, we see Death as that which moves us into the final, and never-ending, time of Life. As one of the Prefaces used in Masses for our Departed Loved ones so beautifully puts it: *"For your Faithful people, Lord, life is changed, not ended; when the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death, we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven."* Today we celebrate all

those Saints who don't get their own special Feast Day; we celebrate all those holy women and men who lived their lives with great holiness in their normal, everyday lives. They're the ones that we know as "the Communion of the Saints" who are in Heaven; they're members of the Church Triumphant in Heaven, who are cheering us on as part of the Church Militant here on Earth.

Most people, in our younger years when we're still maturing, have certain "heroes"---those who might inspire us in some ways about what we want to do, or the kind of person we want to be. Maybe the "hero" is a famous movie star, a member of the "Fortune 500", a sports figures, an historical hero, or a military or political leader. And while there's nothing wrong with that, those "heroes" are not going to help us get to Heaven. The Saints are. Among "All the Saints" whom we celebrate today, are included our own family members, relatives, friends, teachers, and mentors. They are those who have taught us how to live our lives by living their own lives as good, honest, hard-working, self-sacrificing, principled and loving people. They are the ones who faithfully, and joyfully, lived in the example of Jesus, and according to the Beatitudes.

That's what Jesus was teaching us in today's Gospel. The Beatitudes stand, not only as the Preface to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, but actually are a Preamble to His entire Gospel. What does it mean to be a Follower of Jesus, to live a life of holiness, to be a part of the Kingdom of God? The answer is found in 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 Homily, something struck me in a new way. Jesus talked about people who are poor, who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for justice, for those in need of mercy, a pure heart, searching for peace, or falsely accused or persecuted/bullied for doing what's right. Doesn't that pretty much include every human being to ever live? No matter where, when, or in what circumstances a person lives, who hasn't at some time or another been faced with any, or all, of those human conditions?! The monumental insight that Jesus was teaching us was in how we choose to cope with those human conditions. That choice comes down to a simple question: do I choose to give into human weakness in the face of these circumstances, or do I choose to practice virtue and follow the example of Jesus and the Saints? In the face of the human realities that we encounter, do we choose to become angry at others, or be angry at the world? Do we allow resentment to distort our spirit; do we resort to dishonesty or violence? OR, do we use those moments, in the face of those human conditions, to respond with the mind and heart

of Christ? Do we choose to make those moments opportunities to practice virtue? That's what "the Beatitudes" are: choices we make to follow Christ, or not to follow Christ, in the midst of the realities of our lives. When we choose to live according to the Beatitudes, that is what helps to make God's Kingdom here in this world more clearly seen, and helps to transform the culture of the world around us. All the Saints in Heaven lived the Beatitudes, and in doing so, they advanced the Kingdom of God by choosing to live IN the Kingdom of God.

As Catholics we are "Pro-Life". I use that term with no particular political, societal, judicial, or cultural implication; I use it as purely a factually true and morally right statement from our perspective as a person of faith. To phrase it another way, being "for life" or "in favor of life" means much more than being against "abortion". It means that we see Life as a "good"----all of life, from the first moment of conception until the final natural breath. And we acknowledge that every life has value---every life is significant---every life has eternal consequences. Every one of those among "All the Saints", whether they lived in this world for 95 years, or less than 1 day, mattered. And all of our lives matter as well. The question is: what kind of difference will our life make? Will it be a difference that, because we try to live according to the Beatitudes, adds comfort, mercy, joy, honesty, integrity, kindness, compassion and love to the world? Or will our lives add distrust, disunity, and discord to a world that appears to be increasingly poisoned with those social and moral ills.

But ultimately the most important reason why we are Pro Life is because God has created each and every human life, and given each person an immortal soul, destined for eternity. And it is God's hope that every person will choose to live, consciously or unconsciously, by following Jesus, and by living according to the virtuous ways of the Beatitudes.

We're living in very challenging times. On top of the continued fears of the Pandemic, the world is filled with anxiety, and sadly, our country, on the Eve of Election Day Eve, is deeply divided and contentious. In general people seem closed to dialogue, and intent only on their own opinion. Everyone's talking; but no one is listening. In the midst of all of that, today's Feast reminds us of "who" we really are----we are human beings with an eternal destiny. Through our Baptism, we are united to Christ, and are a vital member of the Body of Christ with all other baptized people in the Church. We have committed our lives to follow Jesus Christ as our Lord and Master, and no other political party, platform, candidate or social practice, if they lead us away from Jesus, and threaten our Eternal Salvation.

In that sense, then, today's Feast asks us if we're just going to be part of the problem, or if we're willing to be part of the solution? If we're going to be part of the problem, that means that we think only about the here and now, and just go along with the crowd. But, if we're going to be part of the solution, that means that we see the "big picture", and it means that we need to renew our commitment made at Baptism: to follow Jesus, to live according to the Beatitudes, allow ourselves to be inspired by the lives of "all the saints", and to pursue a life that, while we will always remain a sinner to one degree or another here in the Church on Earth, will lead us---one day---to be counted among the Communion of the Saints in the Church Triumphant in Heaven.

I can't help but think about the great Hymn: "When the Saints go marchin' in": "Oh Lord, I want to be in that number, when the Saints go marchin' in." That sounds a lot like today's beautiful Psalm Refrain: "Lord, this is the people who long to see Your Face!" When we "want to be in that number" of all the saints and have that as our life-goal; when we long to see the Lord Jesus Himself Face to face in Heaven, and when we long to be reunited with all our loved ones in Heaven---that's what helps us to get through the struggles and challenges we face along the way in this world.

That's what St. John was so profoundly teaching in today's Second Reading: "*Beloved, we are God's children, now!*" Do we realize that? Do we know that? Do we understand what that means? If we do, that's great. If not, then we're going to be much more easily distracted, detoured, or possibly even defeated. Let's remind ourselves of that fact every day; every time we pause to pray; with every breath we take. "I am a child of God!" But, in addition to who we are "now", St. John goes on to talk about who we will be "then": "*what we shall be has not yet been revealed---but we do know that.....we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him Face to face.*" Can you imagine that? As hard as that is to imagine, that is what awaits us in the final part of our life.

So, we need to make sure that we live in this part of our life in such a way that will lead us in the right ways. That's why the Mass is so critically important to us, so that we can hear God's Word, and join together---in person or virtually---being united with the Body of Christ here, and united with the rest of the Body of Christ throughout the Church universal through this Holy Eucharist we celebrate together. That is what strengthens us to go forth, more fully aware of who we are---Children of God/sisters and brothers in Christ---ready to follow Jesus by living

according to the Beatitudes. That is what helps to build the Kingdom of God here, and that is what helps to change the world.

Let us embrace Jesus' encouragement and promise that we heard at the end of today's Gospel passage: Let us "*Rejoice and be glad. For your reward will be great in heaven.*"