

Photo attributed to the Vatican



## Solemnity of All Saints – November 1

10,000 and counting. That is how many saints are recognized by the Roman Catholic Church.

Today, we celebrate all of them and in doing so, we celebrate unity, diversity, holiness, and witness.

One common denominator for every saint – someone the Church is confident has attained the blessing of heaven – is their unwavering witness to Jesus. Being a witness is the first requirement of the missionary. This witness is a personal testimony to who Jesus is for me and for us; it is not an impersonal, or dramatic, articulation of someone else's faith. Being a witness is a declaration, in word and deed, of being in love.

The credibility of a witness is not just judged by the coherence of one's speech but by the integrity of one's life. That is what holiness is – living one's faith day in and day out, in good times and in bad, addressing the challenges of the time with the eternal truths of our faith.

This feast has an interesting history. The Pantheon was built as a Roman Temple to “all the gods” by emperor Hadrian in 126 AD. It is an amazing building – truly an architectural feat. According to Wikipedia, the “Pantheon's dome is still the world's largest unreinforced concrete dome.” And, it is a Catholic Church. Pope Boniface IV dedicated the Pantheon as a church to “the Virgin Mary and the Martyrs” and established the feast of all saints, May 13<sup>th</sup>, in the year 609 AD. Martyrdom was, understandably, considered to be highest form of witness and a testimony to one's integrity of faith, to one's holiness. Pope Gregory III, in the eighth century, moved the feast to its current date, November 1<sup>st</sup>, and made it the Solemnity of All Saints.

Saints, in one sense, are all the same because of their witness to Jesus and their integrity of faith and yet they are so incredibly different from each other. How different is a St. Teresa of Calcutta, St. John XXIII, St. John Paul II, and St. Oscar Romero? Just consider the five people proclaimed saints a few weeks ago by Pope Francis – an Englishman who converted to Catholicism and became a leading theologian, St. John Henry Newman; a Roman woman, foundress of the Daughters of Saint Camillus, who cared for the poor, St. Giuseppina Vannini; a woman mystic from India, founder of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family, who cared for the poor in India, St. Mariam Thresia Mankidiyan; a Swiss laywoman who dedicated her life to prayer and service to her parish community, St. Marguerite Bays; and a woman born in Brazil who cared for the poorest of the poor, St. Dulce Lopes Pontes.

It is their rich diversity, and startling similarity, that celebrates the unity of our faith. As we keep our eyes focused on Jesus, it is Jesus we begin to see in others, in the poorest of the poor, in creation, in one another – even separated by time and space – and even in ourselves. It is because of the witness of the saints that we begin to see the faith, integrity, and holiness in others today.

Today we celebrate all saints – all those who have attained heaven – whether the church has declared them saints or not. We also celebrate those saints walking among us who, every day, point to Jesus, keep the faith, and serve others. We celebrate, too, those seeds of sanctity that are already taking root and the promise of future saints.

May the witness of “all the saints” inspire us to keep our eyes on Jesus so we see Jesus in others and accompany them in their own journey of healing and holiness. As Pope Francis said when he came to visit the United States of America in 2015, “love is our mission.”

*Visit [uscatholicmission.org/missionary-saints](http://uscatholicmission.org/missionary-saints) for more reflections on saints who lived mission at home and abroad.*