

31st Sunday (B)

Homilies typically illuminate the readings from Mass, especially the Gospel. That is its goal. But today I'm going to break from that to talk about... Halloween.

Halloween is a Christian and particularly Catholic celebration. The word comes from old English and means "All Hallows Eve." It is a pre-celebration before the festivities of All Saints Day. Very much like Christmas Eve celebrates Christmas the night before, Halloween is a gearing up for this special. Because our culture emphasizes Halloween so much we forget about All Saints Day.

This shows us how Catholic Halloween is because which Christian churches venerate the saints? This was one of Martin Luther's critiques. Veneration of the saints was idol worship to him. As Protestants began taking over Catholic Churches in Europe they smashed and destroyed all statues and images of Mary and the saints. In the West, Outside of Anglicans/Episcopalians, Catholics are the only Christians who venerate the saints.

These things have been usurped. When we think of Halloween we think of ghosts, and goblins, and scary things. So much so that we forget the Christian heart of why we are doing this in the first place. We shouldn't be shocked that the world tries to cover-up Christian celebrations. We see this with our two most important feasts. Christmas is all about Santa and not the birth of Jesus and Easter is about the Easter Bunny, not the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

The point of all of this isn't to say don't go trick-or-treating or make Jack-O-Lanterns. No. What I'm getting at is remember why we are feasting today, and don't forget to party tomorrow too. The gathering today should continue into tomorrow. Most of us do not, which doesn't make sense. It's like partying on Christmas Eve and doing nothing the next day. What we do on Halloween logically should continue into November 1st.

Halloween should show us just how important and special the saints are, in that the celebration begins the night before. So why are the saints special? Because they are the men and women who have walked this earth and found the path to Heaven. They have battled sin in their life, encountered the challenges of their day, dealt with daily stresses and anxieties, and still remained faithful to Jesus Christ in and through their vocations. We need their help and intercession, so that we might one day be where they are now.

Many were priests or nuns who did amazing things. Look at Mother Teresa, a small Albanian nun who captured the modern world by the charity she showed to the poor of Calcutta. Many were lay and married. Sts. Louis and Zelie Martin were the parents of St. Therese, and the first husband and wife to be canonized at the same time. Some died old, and others died young. Bl. Carlo Acutis died from leukemia in 2006 at the age of 15. He was a gamer and a computer geek. He started a website to compile all of the Eucharistic miracles that happened around the world. (The posters we've been displaying this year come from his website.)

Today and tomorrow are great opportunities for celebration, but also for spiritual renewal. We can get so bogged down with things of things of earth that we forget the things of Heaven. The Church is visible, but also invisible. All Saints Day reminds us of this invisible part of the Church, and serves as a reminder to lift up our eyes and our gaze to Heaven, and not lose focus of that.

But it is not just the saints in Heaven who make up the invisible Church, it is also the souls in Purgatory. This is the logic of why All Souls Day is the next day on November 2nd. We celebrate the victorious in Heaven, and then move to pray for those who have died and are in Purgatory. That is who we pray for on that day.

There are two main reasons why All Souls Day is good for us. Firstly, we are encouraged to pray for the dead, which is a spiritual work of mercy. We should never forget to pray for the dead, especially our deceased loved ones. Secondly, we are reminded of our own mortality, that we all will die one day. We do not know when, so the prudent thing is to be prepared now, not tomorrow or next week, but now. This preparation is important because our salvation is not guaranteed. St. Paul says to work out our salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12), and even Jesus Himself said that not everyone who prays will enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt. 7:21).

So how do we prepare ourselves? Firstly through the sacraments, especially Confession. Going to Confession often, and immediately after grave sin, helps to be as pure as we can. Because we are judged at our death according to the state of

our soul when we die. It's not a weighing of the good vs. the bad that we've done.

We go to heaven or hell according to the condition our soul is in at our death.

Frequent Confession keeps our soul as pure as possible. Secondly, doing God's will before our own. We say in the Our Father, "thy will be done," not "my will be done." So sometimes this means going against ourself and our will. The grace that He gives through prayer and Eucharist gives us the strength we need to do His will.

So today is a good day because tomorrow is an even better day. Let the party continue into tomorrow. Talk about the saints with your family, your favorite ones, or your favorite stories (Corbinian's Bear). But be open to the graces available, to spark a desire to want to be a saint. And may All Souls Day encourage us to not wait, to begin now, to want to be holy and virtuous now. We all will die one day, but we know not the day nor the hour.