

## **Homily for All Saints, Nov. 1, 2009**

**Intro:** Today we celebrate one of the oldest feasts of the Church, going back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. The church wanted to recognize all the martyrs who had died in the persecutions of the second and third centuries, but who were not otherwise remembered in the feast days of the church. Gradually, the feast of All Saints became a celebration of all who had witnessed to Christ with their lives---virgins and married, martyrs and those who simply lived quietly heroic lives of virtue.

**The Readings of the Feast** describe these saints.

*The Gospel of Matthew* describes the virtues of these children of God when they lived on earth. They were like Jesus himself the Son of God---they were Poor in spirit, giving for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven, mourning for the sin and death present in this world, not clinging to their entitlements as kings, nobles, mayors, fathers, hungering and thirsting for true justice on earth, merciful to sinners, to the lonely and outcasts, completely dedicated to the Reign of God on this earth, peacemakers, in their families and neighborhoods and towns, persecuted for the sake of God's true justice. If we want to inherit the Kingdom of heaven as sons and daughter of God, then we must live as they did, in imitation of the Son of God.

*The Apocalypse* speaks of the reward of these saints at the end of time. The angels, bearing his seal as agents of God, mark out 144,000 Jews as those who are saved. This is a symbolic number, 12,000 for each of the 12 tribes. It means a large number, but not in comparison with the number of Gentiles, who are described as "a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue." That's us---Germans and Greeks, Mexicans and Moroccans, Congolese and Koreans. These all participate in the hymn of praise to Christ and the Lamb of God, the victorious Lord of heaven and earth. "Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving, honor, power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen." What a magnificent way to pass and eternity!

*The first epistle of John* tells us that these are all children of God, unrecognized by the world, but revealed fully as children of God in heaven. They will then be fully children of God when they see God as God is. They will then recognize themselves as those made fully in his image and likeness by the Holy Spirit which they then possess in its fullness.

### **What does all this mean for us today?**

First of all, the promise of everlasting joy in heaven gives us hope to live each day as Jesus lived. The more we empty ourselves of our own sense of entitlement, our ego, the more we live for others as Jesus did, the more we sons and daughters of God will receive the joy of everlasting love and peace. That glorious future, of which the Holy Spirit is the down payment now, ought to govern the lives we live today. As St. Paul says, “I consider the sufferings of this present time as nothing compared to the glory to be revealed for us.” (Rom 8:18) Conversely, those who’s God is money, or pleasure, or power will be buried in the death those things bring for all eternity. We inherit what we live for. What are you living for?

Second, we rejoice not for ourselves, but for all those who have lived the life of Christ. We rejoice in their reward, their bliss as daughters and sons of God. They might be our direct mother or father, or they might be our ancestors in the faith. As Christians we belong to them and they belong to us. Our gratitude leads us to rejoice with their peace and joy. We then participate in the joy of all the Communion of Saints. Their success, too, gives us strength for the day and hope for the future. .

Third: Last week we read from the Epistle to the Ephesians at daily Mass. The author called his readers “fellow citizens with these holy ones, and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” They “are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” (Eph 2:20,22) We are the contemporary saints of God, the building stones which form the temple of God on earth. You may not feel like a saint, because you are so aware of your sins. I suspect that most of the saints now rejoicing in heaven had the same feeling when they were here. They too knew their sins. The old hagiographies glossed over all of this. The difference between them and you is that they were also aware of the power of the Holy Spirit making them better than they would have been without that Spirit. . They took every opportunity to be aware of their possession of the Holy Spirit, in their private prayers, in their celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments, even in the work which they dedicated to their God.

The feast calls each of us to spend time this week thinking about the fact that we are, through our baptism and confirmation, already temples of the Holy Spirit. Ask God to make you aware of this sanctity which is already yours. It is the good news.