

All Saints Day November 1, 2009

Readings: Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12a

Journey to Sainthood

We often like to lump people into opposite groups: Democrats or Republicans; liberals or conservatives; in the stock market, we might look for bears or bulls; and in local college football, maybe Michigan fans or Michigan State fans, although neither group has much to cheer about lately. Sometimes we hear the same thing said of saints and sinners, as if they are two different opposite groups. But, in reality, all saints, with the exception of our Blessed Mother, have been sinners. Saints are not those who have not, or do not, sin. Saints are those that recognize that they are sinners and try to do something about it.

A French poet* once wrote: *“Life holds only one tragedy, ultimately: not to have been a saint.”* We are all, hopefully, *saints-in-progress*, on a course that leads to Heaven. Ultimately it is the only thing that really matters. We are trying to be holy, but sometimes we fail; sometimes we sin. We are part of the Communion of Saints. We on this earth who are still trying to become holy, who are fighting temptation trying to grow closer to the Lord, are the part of the Communion of Saints called the Church Militant. We work each day trying to be holy. We try to be as holy as possible when we end our journey on earth because we know that nothing which is not holy can enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. But we know that if we stay in a state of sanctifying grace, if we do not cut off our relationship with God by committing unconfessed mortal sins, that we can still get to heaven. If we are in a state of grace when we die, but we have not completely sanctified ourselves yet, have not become completely holy, we will still join the saints in heaven. We may have to spend some time, however, in Purgatory being purified, being part of the Church Suffering. And tomorrow, All Souls Day, is a special day to pray for the souls suffering in Purgatory. We pray for God’s mercy on those souls so that their time there may be shortened. But it is important to remember that it is just a matter of time before those souls get to heaven and join the Church Triumphant. They are, in effect, *saints-in-waiting*.

Often we think only of those in heaven as the ones who are saints. Indeed, those in heaven are saints; they have been completely sanctified, made holy. But the souls in Purgatory are saints as well, they just need a little cleaning up. And for us, still on this side of the grave, we are saints also as long as we stay in a state of sanctifying grace. We receive sanctifying grace at baptism and we only lose it when we commit mortal sin. If we lose it, we only regain it by going to confession. Staying in a state of grace is a continual battle, and that is why we who are still on earth are called the Church Militant. We have to be vigilant; we have to keep fighting against the evil one. We have to get up each morning and choose to follow Christ. And on this Feast of All Saints we are reminded to look to the lives of the saints for guidance on how to get to heaven. We look at how they lived, what they wrote, and what they said. They should be our role models, not sports heroes, movie stars, and other celebrities.

We also have the commandments to help guide us so that we can avoid sin. And Jesus

also gives us the Beatitudes. We heard them in our gospel passage this morning from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus doesn't always say that it will be easy to follow Him; we may have to suffer poverty and we may sometimes have to mourn. But He concludes the passage this morning with great words of promise for those that keep trying to follow His teachings. He says: ***“Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.”***

Let us reflect on Jesus' words and examine how well we are doing at being saints.

- How well are we doing at striving to be meek? It's not what the world teaches us.
- How much do we hunger and thirst for righteousness? Or do we turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to injustices around us?
- How are we doing at being forgiving and merciful to other? It will be the measure God uses for giving us His forgiveness and mercy. It may influence how much mercy we receive and how long we spend in Purgatory.
- How clean and pure are our hearts? Jesus says that we won't be able to see the face of God unless our hearts are purified. Work to purify your heart now or it will be done for you in Purgatory.
- How are we doing as peacemakers in our homes, at work, or on the playground? Jesus says peacemakers will be called children of God, and He also tells us that we must be like little children to enter into the Kingdom.
- Are we willing to be insulted and persecuted for our faith in Christ? Are we willing to pick up our crosses and be martyrs by dying to the world each day?

These are all things that come along with being a saint; with choosing to follow Jesus instead of the ways of the world. It's not an easy job being a saint in today's world, being a member of the Church Militant. But when you get right down to it, it is the only thing that really matters.

Deacon Joe Hulway

- * There are two very similar quotes, both attributed to French men of about the same time period. I couldn't find the original source for either and so cannot attest to their validity, but both are referenced by Peter Kreeft in different books. The French author, Leon Bloy, wrote, "There is only one tragedy, not to be a saint." Charles Peguy, a French poet wrote, "Life holds only one tragedy, ultimately: not to have been a saint."