

Sermon for the Solemnity of All Saints
Sunday, November 4, 2018
“Saints matter”

Texts: Luke 6:20-36

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I sing a song of the saints of God,
patient and brave and true,
who toiled and fought and lived and died
for the Lord they loved and knew.
And one was a doctor, and one was a queen,
and one was a shepherdess on the green:
they were all of them saints of God and I mean,
God helping, to be one too.

Anyone here at mass this morning will, without a doubt, get the message that saints matter. We have literally pulled out all the stops! A grand procession, special music, a break from the Ordinary Time liturgical color of green to festive white, the sacrament of baptism, a special coffee hour—all of this to show with great solemnity that saints matter. Not only is today a major feast of the Christian Church, but it is also our parish’s titular feast, a celebration of the name of our church. We’re having a birthday party!

Why are saints important? Why do we go through all this fuss about a bunch of dead folks? For starters, we’re not here to celebrate death, but life; we’re celebrating women and men who lived extraordinary and exemplary lives that serve as models for us and the way we ought to live. Second, we are celebrating testimonies throughout the ages of God’s goodness and love—love so intense that he allowed himself to live among us as one of us in Jesus the Christ to offer us a deeper understanding of who God is.

Saints seem to do things better than the rest of us. They live better. They seem to act better. And often, they say things better, like:

“The reason for our existence is to quench the thirst of Jesus. When he asked for water, the soldier gave him vinegar to drink—but his thirst was for love, for souls, for you and me.” (Mother Teresa of Calcutta)

“This is a serious warning cry: Surrender without reservation to the Lord who has called us. This is required of us so that the face of the earth may be renewed.” (Edith Stein)

“The most deadly poison of our times is indifference. And this happens, although the praise of God should know no limits. Let us strive, therefore, to praise him to the greatest extent of our powers.” (Maximilian Kolbe)

“God asks little, but He gives much.” (St. John Chrysostom)

“All the science of the Saints is included in these two things: To do, and to suffer. And whoever has done these two things best, has made himself most saintly.” (Saint Francis de Sales)

“All blessings come to us through our Lord. He will teach us, for in beholding his life we find that he is the best example.” (Teresa of Avila)

“Actions speak louder than words. Let your words teach and your actions speak.” (Anthony of Padua)

“‘With my mouth,’ God says, ‘I kiss my own chosen creation. I uniquely, lovingly, embrace every image I have made out of the earth’s clay. With a fiery spirit I transform it into a body to serve all the world.’” (Hildegard of Bingen)

“Praise and bless my Lord, and give him thanks and serve him with great humility.” (Francis of Assisi)

“We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become.” (Clare of Assisi)

“Pray, hope, and don't worry.” (Padre Pio)

Oh yes, saints seem to suffer better (often of their own choosing). St. Francis of Assisi was noted for sleeping with rocks for his pillow and covering his meat with ash before eating, so he would not enjoy it. I’m not saying you have to do that in order to be saintly—only if you feel called to put ashes on your meat. I do not feel so called, and I have no problem enjoying my food. And many saints have died on account of their faith;

they are the martyrs. So saints do things that make us go, “Wow!” Saints always seem bigger than life, better than we, and impossible to imitate. They seem to have a deeper connection with God.

But the thing is, all of the saints, every one of them, were people just like you and me. They were ordinary humans who did or said extraordinary things. They are examples to us, because they give us something to strive for. Most of the saints themselves felt inadequate. Most of them were extremely humble. They didn’t even become saints until they died and other people thought their lives were noteworthy enough to be made a saint. You can look all around and see saints—people living today, doing exceptional things. Our celebration today includes them too. “All Saints” means saints past, present, and future. Members of the great cloud of witnesses—that’s kind of like the heavenly iCloud or DropBox. The saints who have gone before are out there somewhere in a place we cannot see, but we can access them at any time. We can ask them to pray for us, just like we can pray for each other, but we feel like they’re closer to God, since, as it says in the Book of Wisdom, “the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God.” The saints of the past were great, because they lived lives, not for themselves, but for others in the world with selfless devotion and conviction. That is the example we are to take from the saints. If we ask ourselves, “What would Jesus do?” the answer is in the message from the Gospel. We would feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give water to the thirsty, and live a life of selfless love, like the saints we venerate.

The other reason we celebrate today is because the Feast of All Saints reminds us of our hope for the resurrection at some future time. When someone dies, we celebrate his/her life because we expect them to rise again, and we expect that we will do the same ourselves. We can say this, because Jesus the Christ did it, and because he did it, we will do it. That’s the promise made to us in his death and resurrection. Our own baptism represents that same death and resurrection: as we go down into the water, we die to sin and come out, raised to new life in Christ.

Now, being a Christian doesn’t guarantee that life will always be good. Often we Christians have a false idea that if we live a perfect life in Christ that nothing bad will happen, that we’ll have perpetually happy lives. No, and yes. There is no guarantee that unfavorable things won’t

happen to us; life just doesn't work that way. Bad things happen. But the better we are at living a Christ-like life, the easier it will be to deal with those bad things when they do happen. We will be able to overcome any adversity that comes our way, through the help of God. Having that reassurance that with God we can overcome anything, can lead to lower stress, decreased anxiety, an easier time getting through our pain and grief, and strength to go on. That in itself will make us generally happier. (Even scientific studies have shown that people who connect to their faith live happier, longer lives.) And, of course, we should always thank God when good things are happening to us.

Look all around. See the saints all around you. Look up at the clerestory windows, where many of the saints are shown looking down on us in beautiful stained glass. They are the saints who have gone before. Take a look around the room. See all of the saints who are alive right now. Think of the heroes of your life and the heroes you've heard and read about. Think about your heroes living right now. Think about all those ordinary people who are doing extra-ordinary things. And look at yourself, because:

They lived not only in ages past,
There are hundreds of thousands still.
The world is bright with the joyous saints
Who love to do Jesus' will.
You can meet them in school, or in lanes, or at sea,
In church, or in trains, or in shops, or at tea;
For the saints of God are just folk like me,
And I mean to be one too. Amen.

Resources

"Quotes by Saints" in *Boston Catholic*, <http://www.bostoncatholic.org/Being-Catholic/Content.aspx?id=11480>

"Holy Quotes from Catholic Saints," <https://blog.franciscanmedia.org/franciscan-spirit/holy-quotes-from-catholic-saints>

RiteSong Online, www.riteseries.org