

HOMILY-ALL SAINTS DAY 09

DEFINITION

On this day the church venerates all those, known and unknown, who through God's grace and their faithfulness have received the gift of eternal life.

In doing so, we, the Church on earth, traditionally give thanks for their lives, consider their example and strive to emulate them, ask for their intercession in the trials of this life, and glorify God through the multitude that have gone before us, remembering that we too are called to be saints.

Veneration of the Saints is giving glory to God for the ways he has worked in their lives. The saints are a gift to us.

HISTORY

In the early centuries martyrs alone were venerated as saints, and a feast of "the martyrs of all the earth" was celebrated in Edessa and elsewhere in Syria by the middle of the fourth century. Its usual date was the first Sunday after Pentecost.

In the 8th Century there was a feast of All Saints in England and France celebrated on November 1. Rome seems to have followed this practice.

This Feast began with the celebration of the martyrs and the prayer at the tomb of martyrs. Later the Feast continued to recognize those who had suffered for the faith but had not been martyred. Later the Feast recognized other heroes of the Faith.

REVELATION

Today's feast celebrates the whole company of saints, including all those not recognized by name in the church calendar, all those who are part of the great multitude that now leaps for joy eternally in God's presence, shouting hallelujah!

The Book of Revelation presents a vast throng of 144,000 who praise God and the Lamb. They have made it past the tribulation. They stand before God and the Lamb. They have won victory by suffering death and not inflicting hurt.

People of every race, nation, people and tongue, purified and robed in white, waving palm branches in gestures of thanks and victory, crying out exuberantly, acclaiming the salvation that comes from God. There are so many that they cannot be counted.

Today's feast assures us of a place within this great heavenly chorus when we accept the grace of being sealed as God's own and then choose to live in accord with that grace. It also reminds us that none of us is an only child. We belong to a great family, a great cloud of witnesses, who constantly surround us and are in communion with us, praying for and with us, urging us onward toward our final reunion with God and them.

MEANING OF FEAST

"ALL SAINTS"

This feast also reminds us that great saints who have their own feast days, like lesser ones who have not, have come from all states and walks of life: clergy and lay, married and single, humble and mighty.

Today's canonizations come from a greater variety of backgrounds and countries, and from this diverse group of saints it is possible to form a more comprehensive view of what constitutes the universal holiness of the Church than it was in the past.

Communion of Saints

The Communion of Saints is made up of the faithful on earth, in purgatory and in heaven. The communion of saints is formed by the Holy Spirit into one body participating in Christ's life by Baptism. It is mentioned in the third article of the Apostles Creed and probably dates from the late fourth century. All the faithful on earth, in purgatory and in heaven share the common life of the body (Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, nn. 49-51).

Those in heaven are in a position to assist not only those in purgatory but also the faithful on earth, who have honored the saints in heaven and sought their intercession.

In our baptism we become a member of the Mystical Body of Christ. We believe that there is a bond between the saints on earth, in purgatory and in heaven.

The Feast of All Saints points to our ultimate goal to be with God.

Why the "All" in "All Saints." First of all to one can count all the Saints and because all of us are called to be Saints.

When we profess our faith in the communion of saints we express our conviction that we can find the means to holiness in our faithfulness to Christ's teachings. Members of the Church are rewarded in this life and eternally in heaven.

JOURNEY TO ETERNAL LIFE

Eternal life is the work of God in our lives. The faith that leads to eternal salvation is an ongoing dialogue with God. God calls us to faithfulness and we are called to continually say yes through the way we live.

Holiness comes to us first through baptism. The Holy Spirit comes into our lives and brings sanctifying grace. This makes us holy. Holiness is thus properly ascribed to us because we are created in the image of God and are to be recreated in his likeness through grace.

How do we live out lives of holiness that leads to the eternal life that is our goal? The Beatitudes give us a window into holiness. Therefore I will use the Beatitudes as a way of describing how we live lives of holiness.

Beatitudes

In the Beatitudes Jesus walks up a high mountain, sits down and begins to teach his disciples. Jesus takes the posture of a teacher and begins to teach the disciples and the crowds God's word. The Beatitudes tell us who is "blessed" or happy.

Jesus begins by stating, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God."

In each of the Beatitudes we learn who is truly happy because they will receive eternal from God. When God's kingdom comes, the kind of people who possess the virtues listed in the Beatitudes or do what they entail will be rewarded. The beatitudes show the characteristics and actions that will receive their full and appropriate eschatological reward.

The first Beatitude says that those who completely rely on God will receive eternal life. The word for poor in spirit is taken from the word *anawim*. The *anawim* were those who had little in this world and so that had to rely on God. The first Beatitude is saying that those who are truly happy are those who completely rely on God.

- 1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**
- 2. Blessed are the mourners, for they will be comforted.**

Happy are those who mourn in this life and especially mourn for their sins for they will be comforted by God.

3. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

Happy are those who are meek for they will inherit the land of heaven. Happy are those who live those who live humble lives for they will be given eternal life.

4. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

Happy are they who hunger and thirst to live in a right relationship with God and others. They will be satisfied by God in this life and in the next.

5. Blessed are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy.

Happy are those who show mercy to others for God will show mercy to them. To understand this Beatitude we must think about the Judgment Scene toward the end of Matthew's Gospel. In that scene Jesus judges the nations and promises eternal life to those who care for the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, the naked, the prisoner and the stranger. Those who receive eternal life are those who cared for Jesus in the least of their brothers and sisters.

6. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Happy are the pure in heart for they will see God in eternal life. Blessed are those who live lives of integrity. Happy are those who live morally upright lives, whose actions and intentions correspond. They will see God in eternity.

7. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Happy are those who work for peace in relationships. They will be called sons of God. Sons of God are the names often given to the angels in the Bible. Peacemakers will be invited to join the angels at the Last Judgment.

8. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Happy are those who have been persecuted for living as a Christian. Those who are not afraid to live their faith will receive the kingdom of heaven.

The Beatitudes give us an important window in how we can live the life of holiness to which God calls and which leads to eternal life. In discussing holiness I would also like to quote Pope Benedict XVI. Pope Benedict XVI said in the General Audience of January 31, 2007: "Holiness increases with the capacity for conversion, repentance, willingness to begin again, and above all with the capacity for reconciliation and forgiveness.... What makes us holy is the capacity for reconciliation and pardon. Holiness is not only about living out certain qualities or virtues. Holiness is also about conversion or turning away from sin.

As we reflect on this Feast of All Saints let us reflect on how we live and how we turn away from those sins and actions which keep us separated from God.