

## **Feast of All Saints**

The readings and prayers of today's liturgy invite us to share the heavenly jubilation of the saints, to taste the joy. The saints are not a restricted caste of elect but a crowd without number toward which, today, the liturgy exhorts us to lift our eyes.

Among this multitude are not only the officially recognized saints but the baptized of every age and nation who have sought to accomplish the divine will with love and fidelity. Many there are whose faces and names we do not know but with the eyes of faith we see them shine like stars full of glory in the divine firmament.

In the first reading the author of the Revelation describes "a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people and tongue. This people comprises the saints of the Old Testament, beginning with Abel the Just and the patriarch Abraham, and then those of the New Testament, the many martyrs at the beginning of Christianity, the blessed and the saints of the ages that followed, and finally the witnesses of Christ in our own time. What was common to them all was the will to incarnate the Gospel in their existence through the impulse of the Holy Spirit, who is the eternal giver of life to the people of God.

Behold the meaning of today's solemnity: Gazing upon the luminous example of the saints the great desire to be like the saints is awakened in us; happy to live near to God, in his light, in the great family of the friends of God. Being a saint means living close to God, living in his family. And this is the vocation of us all, vigorously reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council, and on this day brought to our attention in a solemn way.

But how can we become saints, friends of God? An initial response to this question is this: To be saints it is not necessary to perform extraordinary deeds and works, nor is it necessary to possess exceptional charisms. But this only tells us what sainthood is not. The positive answer is that to become a saint it is above all necessary to listen to Jesus and then to follow him and not lose heart in the face of difficulties.

"If anyone wants to serve me," Jesus says, "he must follow me, and where I am there also is my servant. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him" (John 12:26). Whoever entrusts himself to him and loves him with sincerity, will die to himself as the grain of wheat buried in the earth.

He knows in fact that whoever tries to keep his life for himself will lose it and whoever gives his life, in this way, finds life (cf. John 12:24-25). The experience of the Church demonstrates that, although they take different paths, all forms of holiness must always pass through the way of the cross, the way of self-denial.

The biographies of the saints depict men and women who, always docile to divine

designs, sometimes endured indescribable sufferings, persecutions and martyrdom. They persevered in their task. "These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress," we read in the Book of Revelation, "they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14).

Their names are written in the book of life (cf. Revelation 20:12); paradise is their eternal abode. The example of the saints encourages us to follow in their footsteps, to experience the joy of those who entrust themselves to God, because the only cause of sadness is to live far from Him.

Holiness demands a constant effort but it is possible for all since it is not just the work of man but is above all a gift of God, who is thrice holy (cf. Isaiah 6:3). In the second reading the Apostle John observes: "See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. And so we are" (1 John 3:1).

It is God therefore who loved us first and in Jesus he has made us adopted sons and daughters. In our life all is a gift of His love. How is it possible to remain indifferent before so great a mystery? How is it possible to not respond to the love of the heavenly Father by leading a life of grateful children?

In Christ he has given himself entirely to us and has called us to a personal and profound relationship with him. Thus, the more we imitate Christ and remain united to him, the more we enter into the mystery of divine holiness. We discover that we are infinitely loved by Him and this moves us to love our brothers and sisters. Loving always means an act of self-denial, "losing oneself," and it is in this way that we become happy.

We therefore arrive at the Gospel of this feast, the proclamation of the beatitudes. Jesus says: Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the afflicted, the meek, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, the merciful, blessed are the pure of heart, the peacemakers, the persecuted for the sake of justice (cf. Matthew 5:3-10).

In truth, the blessed par excellence is Jesus alone. Indeed, He is the truly poor in spirit, the afflicted, the meek one, the one hungering and thirsting for justice, the merciful, the pure of heart, the peacemaker; he is the one persecuted for the sake of justice.

The beatitudes show us the outward spiritual qualities of Jesus and thus express his mystery, the mystery of his death and resurrection, of the passion and the joy of the resurrection. This mystery, which is the mystery of true blessedness, invites us to follow Jesus and thus the way to happiness.

In the measure that we accept his proposal and follow him -- everyone according to his own circumstances -- we too can participate in his beatitude. With him the impossible

becomes possible and in the end the camel passes through the eye of needle (cf. Mark 10:25); with his help, only with his help, we are able to become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect (cf. Matthew 5:48).

My dear brothers and sisters, we now enter into the heart of the Eucharistic celebration, the stimulus and nourishment of holiness. In a short while Christ will become present in a higher way, He who is the true vine to which are united, as branches, the faithful on earth and the saints in heaven.

The communion of the pilgrim Church in the world with the Church triumphant in glory will be strengthened. In the Preface we will proclaim that the saints are for us friends and models of life. We will ask them that they help us to imitate them and to undertake to respond with generosity to the divine call as they did. We will especially call upon Mary, the mother of the Lord and mirror of sanctity. May she, the all-holy one, make us faithful disciples of her son Jesus Christ! Amen.

- Fr. David M. Chiantella