

## **Solemnity of All Saints**

It is quite amazing that we who have faith and believe in eternal life can sometimes allow ourselves to be influenced or contaminated by the unspiritual viewpoint of western culture. We could have heaven on earth, but sometimes we create hell on earth. The programs on TV do not reflect who we are. Who are we is best described by St. John in today's second reading:

*...we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)*

We are not usually portrayed as spiritual beings in this fashion on TV. Television and movies do not reflect our deepest reality described by St. John here.

*See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. (1 John 3:1)*

If we know who we are, we will know how to act—if we know who we are.

The Solemnity of All Saints today reminds us of who we are and what a bright future can be ours. As we celebrate today all the saints, both those canonized and those who are unknown, we are joyful that they have reached the goal of life, which is heaven. They remind us to keep our sights fixed high, to remember who we are and the glorious possibility that God offers us.

The saints encourage us in our own struggles because like us they also endured struggles; they grew from strength to strength; they matured in the Lord as they grew in years. We also see this journey of growth in the great people of the Bible. We could think of Abraham whom Genesis tells us pretended his wife was his sister because he was afraid—but Abraham grew to become our father in faith.

Moses had a speech impediment and had murdered and protested against being called by God but he led his people to the Promised Land.

In the Gospels Peter is impulsive and doesn't want the Lord to suffer but in Acts he is totally transformed and considers it an honor to suffer for the

Lord. Interestingly in Acts even Peter's shadow is a source of healing, something which is not said of Jesus in the Gospels. Obviously Peter's Formation Adviser was out of this world!

The journey of growth in the great people of the Bible is also seen in the canonized saints. The [Curé of Ars](#), St. John Vianney, struggled with learning while in seminary but so many pilgrims went to Ars to confess to him that by 1855 there was a daily service of two horse buses between Lyons and Ars, and two other buses met the Paris train to bring penitents to him. The railway station in Lyons even had a special ticket office for people going to Ars, so many were the pilgrims.

[St. Thérèse](#) wrote in her autobiography that after the death of her mother, "I, once so full of life, became timid and retiring, sensitive to an excessive degree. One look was enough to reduce me to tears." ([Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux, Third Edition](#) pp34-35) She went on to become the Little Flower of Jesus whose relics even stopped the traffic on Fifth Avenue New York because so many people came to venerate her, and three million people venerated her relics during their visit to Ireland in 2001, the same number of people who attended Papal Masses in Ireland in 1979.

[St. Augustine](#) struggled with impurity in his youth. As a teenager he was influenced by the loose living of his companions. When he was studying in Carthage he decided to take a mistress. He was such a scoundrel that he even once said to his mother St. Monica that there would be no problems between them if she gave up her faith! He underwent a conversion in Milan and went on to become a priest at the age of 36 and a bishop at the age of 41, and was Bishop of Hippo in North Africa for 35 years. One example of the influence Augustine has on the Church is that in the Catechism of the Catholic Church there are more quotations from St. Augustine than from any other writer.

[St. Ignatius of Loyola](#) had a colorful past before his conversion. In 1515 Ignatius and his brother Pedro Lopez were arrested and prosecuted for nocturnal misdemeanors that were outrageous. Ignatius says up to his twenty-sixth year he was given to worldly vanities. He was proud, sensuous, and driven by violent and powerful impulses, he demanded

adventure and glory. But after his conversion he noticed that day dreaming about the saints brought him joy but not worldly matters. And thus gradually he developed the rules for discernment of spirits and established the Society of Jesus. He established a college in Rome for young men entering the Society of Jesus and also set up colleges in Jerusalem, Cyprus and Constantinople. At his death in 1556 the Society of Jesus had 1000 members with 100 houses throughout the world. We see this same journey of growth in the lives of all the saints.

The saints remind us of who we really are, not the culture that surrounds us. We as Church, as saints; must convert the culture and not let it convert us.

Not only the saints' lives but also their writings are precious gifts of grace to us to remind us of who we are and the glory that God is offering to us. We could think of St. Thérèse's *Story of a Soul* with this beautiful excerpt:

*"Charity is the most excellent way that leads to God. I finally had rest...I understood that the Church had a Heart and that this Heart was burning with love. I understood that love comprised all vocations, that love was everything, that it embraced all times and places, in a word, that it was eternal! Then in the excess of my delirious joy, I cried out: O Jesus, my love, my vocation, at last I have found it, my vocation is love!" (Chapter 9, Clarke 194)*

We treasure the Confession of St. Augustine with its words,

*"You have made us for yourself O Lord and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee."*

We treasure the writings of St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius and the writings of all the saints. Although the saints had much room for growth early in their lives by the end of their lives we see that they were living the beatitudes of our Gospel today (Matt 5:1-12). Therefore they give encouragement to us as we are aware of our need for further growth. The saints were happy because they were poor in spirit, meek, hungry and thirsting for righteousness, merciful and clean of heart. Among the saints we venerate in a special way the martyrs. As our first reading from Revelation states:

*These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Rev 7:14)*

They remind us to keep our sights fixed high, to remember who we are and the glorious possibility that God offers us. We know that they are praying for us.

We hope and pray that all those near and dear to us who have departed are already or will soon be numbered among the saints and so we pray for them especially during this month beginning on Monday, the Feast of All Souls.

My brothers and sisters, we are all called to holiness, we are all called to be saints. We see from the lives of the saints that they struggled as we struggle. But we must keep in mind that sanctity is something that God accomplishes in us through grace. We must be open to that grace; we must believe that it is possible to be holy. Read the lives of the saints, read them to your children and your grandchildren. And, pray, pray and strive to be holy as your Father in heaven is holy.

- Fr. David M. Chiantella