

All Saints Day Mass

October 31-November 1, 2020

Readings: Rev. 7:2-4, 9-14; 1 John 3:1-3; Matt. 5:1-12

One could say that today's feast is based on an assumption about what it means to be truly human, about how we define ourselves, and success. Who are we really, and who do we wish to become? Years before ATM's and direct deposit via one's phone, you actually walked into a bank lobby. In one instance, I was cashing a check and realized I had forgotten my ID.

Innocently as possible, I inquired, "Will that be a problem?" "Yes sir, it is a problem." "If it's too much trouble, that's okay." "No, just a second," he replied. I will ask you a series of questions, and if you answer them, we can proceed...What year did you open this account? Puzzled, I replied, "Probably when you were in kindergarten!" He proceeded to ask a series of other questions, ones that I could answer, and I received my cash back. He raised the question—he did not know me—I had to prove my identity.

It surely made me think. What if after I die and approach the pearly gates, I were asked several simple questions—not about name, address, or social security number— but other questions— what would I say? For example:

1. How did you help those most in need?
2. How did you live the beatitudes?
3. How have you shown mercy?
4. How do you hunger and thirst for the sake of holiness?

Could I successfully answer those questions, such that those guarding the gates of heaven would recognize me? Would even they know who I am? I suspect St. Peter's list of questions will be entirely different from what many of us might think, when we define success and happiness.

In the ninth century, Pope Gregory IV declared November 1 as the day for the entire Church Militant (those on Earth) to honor all the Church Triumphant (those in Heaven). All Saints Day is a feast of triumph for all who have fought the good fight, who have kept the faith until the very end of the race, and now enjoy the reward of eternal happiness with God.

This past Thursday, a 21-year-old Algerian man attacked three people inside the Basilica of Notre-Dame de Nice, in southern France. He had arrived in France only one month before. The killings were unprovoked and horrific. One was a 60-year-old woman, a 44-year old mother of three who worked as a caretaker for the elderly, and the 55-year-old longtime Church sacristan. The perpetrator shouted “God is most great” in Arabic during and after the attack. He was arrested by police. A second man has since been arrested in connection with the attack.

These victims were ordinary people, who did ordinary thing. People commented about Vincent Loques, the sacristan: “He's not just a sacristan. He helped a lot the priest who was old. He was the handyman. The candles were always well lit ... He was very discreet and very efficient. He didn't speak much. He acted with great humility and respect. He is the first person we thought of when we learned of the attack.”

Sanctity is often only considered from the perspective of canonized saints, those most associated with the Gospel. Rightfully, they are our heroes. But today's feast is for everyone else who lives a virtuous life and who died in God's good graces, regardless of how well known their lives were to others. They did the ordinary things extraordinarily well—and put complete trust in God.

Your call as members of the laity is to live your faith day in and day out. Our reward will be eternal happiness with God, and the knowledge that our life made a difference—that the world was just a little better off because of us. Through God's mercy and grace, that is all the success I could ever want.

This is not a feast for people who were perfect, but for people who were willing to be perfected. The slogan “Well, nobody's perfect,” has for some become a battle cry, even an excuse for doing wrong. Not at all. This is faulty thinking. Sure, nobody is perfect. God is only interested in whether you are willing to be perfected.

On All Saints Day, we proclaim a resounding “NO” to all the evil in the world. We say no to the reign of the devil, who contrary to some theologians does in fact exist, and is a real spiritual being. This Solemnity is a definitive “No” to evil. This is our special day of triumph, and we must celebrate, lest we give into the temptation to think that evil has won.

Evil has not triumphed, nor will it. We will survive the “time of great distress”¹ because we have been washed in the blood of the Lamb and have been made clean.

In a few minutes you will hear the Prayer over the Offerings, and these prayers in and of themselves are instructive. The prayer notes that **“just as we believe the Saints to be already assured of immortality, so we may experience their concern for our salvation.”**² We not only honor all the saints today, but beg from them their intercession. We believe that they are in God’s presence with a holy concern for our salvation.

During these days, many feel isolated, and perhaps even many more feel worried and stressed. Today’s feast reminds us that none of us is alone. Together we “eagerly hasten” towards the “heavenly Jerusalem, our mother.”³ We are all on pilgrimage, each and every day. And the destination lies before us.

¹ Cf. Revelation 7:14

² 2011 Roman Missal, Prayer over the Offerings for November 2, page 979.

³ Ibid, Preface for All Saints, page 981.