

## All Saints “Celebration of Eternal Life”

Fr. Frank Schuster

One year in Bellingham, at the School Mass for All Saints, I asked the kids, "If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale, and gave all my money to the church, would that get me into heaven. "NO" the children all answered. If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me into heaven?" Again the answer was, "NO!" Well, then, if I was kind to animals and gave candy to all the children of the school and parish, would that get me into heaven?" I asked them again. Once more they all answered, "NO!" "Well," I continued, thinking they were a good bit more theologically sophisticated than I had given them credit for, "then how can I get into heaven?" One of the second graders shouted out, "YOU GOTTA BE DEAD!"

As funny as that was, this child's answer couldn't be farther from the truth! The saints are alive and we hope to be with them someday too. It can be a little confusing this time of year with Halloween getting so much attention. As you recall, Halloween is old English for All Hallows Eve. Just like Christmas Eve is the night before Christmas. All Hallows Eve is the night before the feast of All Hallows. All Hallows is old English for All Holies or All Saints Day, which falls on Nov. 1<sup>st</sup> each year. This is the mass we are celebrating today, the feast of All Hallows. We are celebrating the lives of the saints, and they are not dead, they are alive, leading us to Christ.

Why is All Saints an important celebration? As St. Bernard of Clairvaux mentions in today's office of readings, we do not celebrate this day because the saints somehow need our praise. They are in the presence of God, and need nothing. This is the simple reason why we celebrate this day: We all hope to be saints someday. I have shared with you before how Dorothy Day, the famous soup kitchen activist during the depression responded to a reporter who called her a saint for all the good work she did. Dorothy Day responded, "Do not dismiss me that easily". We are all called to be saints. That is why we come to Church, say our prayers, love God and love neighbor, and persevere in good works and charity. We all want to make the world a better place. My friends, do you know the word we use that defines someone who is in heaven? We call people who are in heaven saints. We all want to be saints. This is why we follow Jesus in the hopes that we will be saints someday.

What is a saint? A saint is someone who by the example of their lives leads people closer to Christ. A saint is someone who is in right relationship with God. The Church gives us official saints whose example and intercession can help lead us to Christ and eternal life in heaven. But there are also saintly people in our lives who lead us to Christ and heaven by the example of their lives.

For my parents and I, this is also a very special day because of our recent pilgrimage to Italy for the Canonization of seven saints from around the globe, including St. Kateri Tekawitha, the first Native American saint. The experience at the Canonization Mass was wonderful in that we were surrounded by over 80 thousand other pilgrims from around the world celebrating these new canonized saints.

We had the opportunity to join the celebration of Mass lead by Archbishop Sartain a couple of times during our week in Rome. It was nice to see Jake Finkbonner again who was in kindergarten at my parish school in Bellingham at the time of his terrible illness and miraculous recovery. Archbishop Sartain talked about how the Church of Rome was founded on the witness of the martyrs like St. Peter and St. Paul. My parents and I toured the Coliseum in Rome where thousands of Christian martyrs were put to death over the years prior to the barbaric games that were held there for entertainment. The one thing all these martyrs had in common is that before they were put to death for simply confessing to be a Christian, they would cry out “Deo Gratias!” “Thanks be to God”. Their last words would echo throughout the crowd because of the good acoustics in that place. Their witness captivated the imagination of the citizens of Rome. After a few centuries, Christianity became the official religion of Rome because of their witness. In fact, the Greek word martyr actually means “to give witness”. We can ask the question, how do we give witness to the Christian faith in our daily lives?

My friends, who are the saints in your life? Who are the saints in your life? St. Francis? St. Dominic? St. Anthony? The Mother of our Lord? Blessed Teresa of Calcutta? Who are the saints in your life? Who bring you closer to Christ? Your parents perhaps? Your spouse? A friend? Perhaps a deceased friend or relative? Who are the saints in your life? Now ask yourself this question, are you living your life as to be a saint? Famous author and Trappist Monk Thomas Merton once wrote about how, during his youth, a friend asked Thomas what he wanted to do with his life? Thomas responded weakly, "well, I suppose I should want to be a good Catholic." His friend responded to Thomas' answer, "Rubbish, what you should say is that you want to become a saint." That challenge stayed with Thomas for his entire life, "what you should say is that you want to become a saint." Let's listen again to what Jesus promises to those who strive for sanctity in their lives. This is what Jesus promises.

"Theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

"They will be comforted."

"They will inherit the land."

"They will be satisfied."

"They will be shown mercy."

"They will see God."

"They will be called children of God."

"Theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

"Your reward will be great in heaven".

My friends, today is All Saints Day. Therefore, today is our day. We remember our vocation given to us in and through Christ. We remember those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith. We look forward to the kingdom of heaven, that endless day surrounded by those we love in the presence of the angels and saints, in the radiant presence of our Lord, who lives in reigns forever and ever. Amen.