

All Saints “We are called to be saints”
Fr. Frank Schuster

Any of you get trick or treaters last night? It was a good night for me. I must have had about 20 or so. In addition to the usual candy bars I had on hand, this year I also decided to give out holy cards celebrating Mother Teresa. Yes, come to my house on Halloween and you are going to get a holy card...deal with it kids! I don't mind Halloween. I like the funny costumes the most, like the kid who comes as a cardboard box or a banana. Last night the winner was a young girl who was dressed like a Kenmore oven, complete with a tray of cupcakes. That was wonderful.

I think I am on to something by giving out holy cards on Halloween because, as you recall, Halloween is Old English for the Evening before All Hallows or All Hovies. Halloween literally means the evening before the feast day of All Saints, and so here we are. This feast day celebrates every saint, even the ones we might not know about but are known to God. And to be clear: we are celebrating the lives of the saints because they are not dead. They are alive with Christ leading us to Christ.

Why is All Saints an important celebration? 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. There is a more basic reason why we celebrate this day: We all hope to be saints someday. 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. So who here wants to be a saint, raise your hand? Every hand should be up!

What is a saint? The simple definition: A saint is someone who by the example of their lives leads people closer to Christ. Sometimes we can get accused by our protestant brothers and sisters that we somehow “worship” saints. Have you ever heard that? We do not worship saints. A saint is someone who by the example of their lives leads us closer to Christ. So, one way to understand the role of saints in our tradition: the saints are our baseball cards. As kids we might collect baseball cards of favorite players. We might even try to dress like them, and imitate them, because if we do so we might be able to play baseball like them someday, if we wear our Nikes and eat our Wheaties, you get the picture.

The saints are our baseball cards. We do not worship them but we do admire them and try to imitate them, do what they do, so to grow closer to Christ. Make sense to you? This is why 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. This feast day today celebrates them as well.

This year's celebration of All Saints is very special for a number of our parishioners because of our recent pilgrimage to Italy for the Canonization of Mother Teresa. Although the weather there was quite warm, the experience at the Canonization Mass was wonderful in that we were surrounded by over 100 thousand other pilgrims from all over celebrating Mother Teresa's witness to the world. A fun fact about Mother Teresa is that her vocation to become a sister came to her during her teenage years. I am always struck by that because we are a younger parish with a lot of teenagers.

I mention this because when Agnes Bojaxhiu originally decided to devote her life to Jesus, join a religious order, and take the name Teresa, she was a teenager which means I don't think we give teenagers enough credit. An appropriate invitation on the feast day of All Saints could be: Are we encouraging our young people enough to pursue a vocation? Many great figures in our world got their start in their teenage years; Mother Teresa was one of them. Why not our kids, right?

During the course of our pilgrimage in Rome for Mother Teresa's Canonization we also learned how the Church of Rome was founded on the witness of the martyrs like St. Peter and St. Paul. We toured the Coliseum in Rome where thousands of Christian martyrs were put to death over the years for entertainment. Over time, it was the witness and the faith of these martyrs that converted the Roman Empire. And as much as we would like to think such sacrifice is relegated to history, we all know there are people today in places around the world who are still persecuted for the only crime of being a Christian. It still happens today. A kid might come home from college and tell their parents he/she decided to become a Christian, and the parents would say, "Are you nuts? You just put yourself and the whole family in danger." This still happens today. I mention this because, on this feast day of All Saints, after visiting places like the Coliseum in Rome, this can inspire questions like, how do I give witness to the Christian faith in my daily life? What does my faith look like?

And so, my friends, who are the saints in your life? Who are your baseball cards? Who are you most drawn to? St. Francis? St. Dominic? St. Anthony? The Mother of our Lord? Mother Teresa of Calcutta? Who are the saints in your life? Who brings you closer to Christ? Your parents perhaps? A friend? Perhaps a deceased friend or relative? A heroic figure like Dorothy Day? Who are the saints in your life? Now ask yourself this question, are you living your life as to be 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. As a Communion of Saints, we remember our vocation given to us in and through Christ to make the world a better place. And so, even if as a culture, we allow ourselves to have fun on Halloween one day a year, as Catholics, we are invited to celebrate All Saints every day of the year by our witness and worship of Christ our Lord. Amen.