

All Saints 2020 “Perseverance in Times of Distress”  
Fr. Frank Schuster

There is a line in our first reading today from Revelation that I have been praying with this week. The question is posed, “Who are these wearing white robes, and where did they come from?” The answer is, “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.” This line struck me because, this year we are celebrating the feast of All Saints in a period we can correctly define as a time of great distress. The time the author of Revelation is alluding to however was of course a lot, lot harder than the days we live in today. Christians back then would have known persecution the likes we can’t even begin to imagine. And yet, Revelation speaks of these saints as having persevered and are therefore dressed in white having been bathed in the Blood of the Lamb. It is a striking image for me. This theme continues in our second reading from first letter of St. John where the author speaks to what it means to be living in times of great distress. He is calling us to persevere and be known as children of God, striving to be pure as God is pure even as we make our way through impure times.

What is a saint? A saint is someone who is in right relationship with God who leads people closer to Christ by the example of their lives. The Church gives us official saints whose example and intercession inspire us to grow closer to Jesus and model what discipleship looks like, especially during difficult times. It must be said though that there are also saintly people in our lives who, although have not been officially canonized, nevertheless also lead us to Christ and heaven by the example of their lives. We all have relatives or ancestors we can reflect on who inspire us. And this is why we have the celebration of All Saints. This feast day is a recognition that heaven is filled with saints that, although are not officially named by the Church, are nevertheless saints of God who can intercede for us. This is enough reason for us to celebrate this day.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux however has something interesting to say in today’s Office of Readings. He essentially says that we do not celebrate this day because the saints somehow need our praise. They are in the presence of God, and need nothing. Instead, he suggests that we celebrate this feast day for the simple reason that we all hope to be saints someday. And this point that St. Bernard is making, is very important for us to reflect on this coming week

You see, whenever the world finds itself in a time of great distress, there will always be people who decide to make the world more miserable and there will always be people who try to make the world a better place. Which one do we want to be? Do we want to be bad news or do we want to be good news? What does that objectively look like for us this coming week? I invite us to reflect on this question because, do you know the word we use that defines somebody who is in heaven? We call people who are in heaven saints. We are all called to be saints. However, being a saint must look like something. It looks like souls who, despite the hardship of living in times of great distress, persevere in their love for Jesus and love for the people around them, especially the most vulnerable.

This is a profound challenge because, on the day we were baptized, the hope people had for us wasn't for us to become another mediocre Christian. The hope people had for us, and God has for us, is that we should become saints. Let's listen again to what Jesus promises to those who strive for sanctity in their lives despite having to live in times that cause us to be poor, tempt us to be sad and at times forgotten. This is what Jesus promises to his faithful when they go hungry, who suffer persecution, who nevertheless choose to be merciful, pure, and be peacemakers. 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."

My friends, today is All Saints Day. If we live out the vocation God has entrusted to us in the times we live in, today can also be a celebration for all of us. Despite everything going on in our world today, we are disciples called to make our world a better place. We are called to be good news. We are called to be a communion of saints who joyfully look forward to the kingdom of heaven, that endless day surrounded by those we love in the radiant presence of our Lord, who lives in reigns forever and ever. Amen.