

SOLEMNITY OF ALL SAINTS IF THEY COULD BE SAINTS, WHY CAN'T I?

"How happy are the poor in spirit; theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5: 3)

Saints, Men and Women like Us: Whereas the Church in other climes is celebrating today as the 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time, we in the Episcopal Conference of England and Wales celebrate the Solemnity of All Saints. This is one of those feasts that the Conference of Bishops has a right to move to the nearest Sunday for pastoral reasons. Therefore, today, in England and Wales, we celebrate the Solemnity of All Saints. The Church gives us this day to be in communion with the faithful departed marked with the sign of faith, now enjoying the beatific vision, singing the eternal "Alleluia!" Oftentimes, when we contemplate the saints, we think of them as people far away; people who lived somewhere out of this world. who had no difficulties and little challenges in life; we sometimes think of them as perfect people who did extraordinary things. There are times too when we think of them as people who spent all their time in the Church or chapel or some sanctimonious enclosures contemplating the divine. Sometimes too, we think of the saints as "superhuman." The saints are none of these. Saints are ordinary men and women, who lived in the world of their times, experiencing similar struggles and sharing the same hopes. They were grandparents and parents, brothers and sisters, rich and poor, healthy and sick, strong and physically challenged, educated and uneducated, employed and unemployed, priests and religious, monks and nuns, young and old, laymen and women in all walks of life; and even teenagers and children. They were ordinary people who did ordinary things in extraordinary ways. They were frail, weak, limited and finite like all of us. Pope Francis explains this even more straightforward: "They are like us, they are like each of us, they are people who before reaching the glory of heaven lived a normal life, with joys and griefs, struggles and hopes."

Their Lives Gives us Hope: The ordinariness of the lives and backgrounds of the saints give us a shared space to relate. They challenge us to aspire and give us hope that we too can become saints. As St. Augustine asked: "If he and she could be saints, why can't I?" And why not? As baptised Christians, "the universal call to holiness" is open to us to seek, in our unique ways, to "be holy as our heavenly Father is holy." The universal call to holiness is a call to be Christ-like in thoughts, words and actions. It is a call to become "new creatures" since we have buried the "old self" with Christ at baptism (Rom. 6: 6). The universal call to holiness is both an invitation and an assurance: for God invites us to make a journey that is possible, a trip that has been completed by those gone before us. The description of the revelation to John in First Reading (Rev. 7: 2-4, 9-14) confirms the fact that "everyone" can become a saint: "After that, I saw a huge number, impossible to count, of people from every nation, race, tribe and language; they were standing in front of the throne and in front of the lamb, dressed in white robes and holding palms in their hands." The door to sainthood is a door open to all

peoples of every nation. This is a very encouraging fact reminding us that “we are God’s children but what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed, all we know is that we shall be like Him (God) because we shall see Him as He really is” (1 Jn. 3: 2).

So what must we do? St. John in the Second Reading (1 Jn. 3: 1-3) tells us: “Surely everyone who entertains this hope must purify himself, must try to be as pure as Christ” (1 Jn. 3: 3). This demand resonates with the response given to John in the revealed experience we read in the First Reading, where he is told: “These are people who have been through the great persecution, and they have washed their robes white again in the blood of the lamb” (Rev. 7: 14). The road to sainthood is not easy: it is undoubtedly a rough road made smooth by grace. Therefore, as The Second Vatican Council directs: we “must follow in His footsteps and conform [our]selves to His image seeking the will of the Father in all things. [We] must devote [our]selves with all [our] being to the glory of God and the service of [our] neighbour. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good, as is admirably shown by the life of so many saints in Church history” (*Lumen Gentium*, 40).

The Beatitudes provide, what I like to call, “The Road Map to Sainthood”, for, in the Beatitudes, we find profound contrast that should characterise the life of a Christian in the world so that he could inherit the Kingdom prepared for him. After all, a saint is one whose life is a “sign of contradiction.” The Beatitudes teach thus: in a world that flaunts its wealth, the Christian is to be poor in spirit, knowing his need for God; where others are proud, he is to be meek, submitting to the will of God in all things; where others choose pleasure and fun of life, he is to accept the inevitable suffering that must come as a way of sharing in Christ’s suffering on the Cross; where injustice, oppression and suppression abound, he is to work sincerely for justice, peace and happiness of all; in a world where revenge and retaliation are the rules, he is to live a life of forgiveness and empathy; in the face of wickedness and self-veneration, the Christian has to freely choose to put God first and above all else; in our violent world, the Christian must stand up as the peacemaker, reconciling all polarising factions; and in persecution, discrimination and abuses, the Christian should rejoice and instead of cursing, pray for his enemies. The tasks here are not easily accessible. Instead, it is a long winding walk through the world’s “dark vale of tears.” To be a Christian is to trust and rely on the grace of God to be able to do that which is beyond the ordinary human abilities to accomplish. This is the lesson we can learn from the saints, who surrendered their lives entirely to God.

Dear friends, let me conclude with these poetic words said to be inspired by St. Pope John Paul II:

“We need saints without cassocks, without veils – we need saints with jeans and tennis shoes. We need saints that go to the movies that listen to music, that hang out with their friends. We need saints that place God in first place ahead of succeeding in any career. We need saints that look for time to pray every day and who know how to be in love with purity, chastity and all good things. We need saints – saints for the 21st century with a spirituality appropriate to

our new time. We need saints that have a commitment to helping the poor and to make the needed social change. We need saints to live in the world, to sanctify the world and not to be afraid of living in the world by their presence in it. We need saints that drink Coca-Cola, that eat hot dogs, that surf the internet and that listen to their iPods. We need saints that love the Eucharist; that is not afraid or embarrassed to eat a pizza or drink a beer with their friends. We need saints who love the movies, dance, sports, theatre. We need saints that are open, sociable normal happy companions. We need saints who are in this world and who know how to enjoy the best in this world without being callous or mundane. We need saints."

Lord, use me as I am and make me the saint that you want me to be. Amen.