

All Saints Day

Year B

*Today we offer the Lamb and celebrate the victory of our God
in the company of all the redeemed in the heavenly kingdom.*

(Readings: Apocalypse 7: 2-4, 9-14.1 John 3: 1-3. Matthew 5: 1-12.)

Since the year 610, 1st November has been designated as the day on which we honour all the saints of God.

So, what is the best way to honour them? We could, of course, as we often do, speak of them in glowing terms. Covid restrictions notwithstanding, we could sing their praises in stirring, grandiose hymns, all of which would be very right and proper, all very appropriate. And yet, I'm not altogether sure that the saints, themselves, would agree with all of that. After all, remember we are talking, now, of the greatest men and women who ever lived.

It is a self-evident truth that flattery means little or nothing to truly great people. When all is said and done, they are not concerned with what others may, or may not, think of them.

In today's first reading, from the Book of the Apocalypse, St John gives us his vision of the saints in heaven. He says of them, "They have washed their robes white again in the blood of the Lamb." This is a powerfully symbolic way of saying that their sins have been forgiven through the sacrificial death of Jesus. In other words, St John is reminding us that, before they were saints, they were sinners, like the rest of us.

They, no less than we, needed forgiveness and cleansing. Their way to the throne of God is based, not on personal merit, but on divine grace. And that 'truth' needs to be underscored, big and bold.

It might seem obvious enough, but all too often, we somehow forget that the saints were just as human, just as frail, and just as fallible as we are. So, while paying tribute to these great giants, these champions of our faith, we should keep that truth clearly in mind.

Another, and I would suggest, a better way in which we can honour the saints, is by learning from them. They thought of themselves as sons and daughters of God. And they wanted to be like him, as far as is humanly possible. They wanted to live in such a way as to please their heavenly Father, achieving all that he wanted of them. And their faith assured them of the wonderful future God had in store for them.

All these sentiments, all these predilections, are summed up by St. John in our second reading, "We are already the children of God but what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed; all we know is, that when it is revealed, we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is."

We are all God's sons and daughters. And we all have the same God-given potential to become his saints. And we can be sure that the saints are praying for us, and with us, that we will, each, realise our highest potential.

Another way we can honour the saints is by continuing the work which they, in varying ways and degrees, themselves began. For example, suppose you were a keen gardener who cultivated the most beautiful flowers imaginable, devoting your whole self to watering, and feeding and pruning these plants. When you die, and are no longer able to look after them, how happy would you feel, knowing that there was someone else to take over your work, to give the same care for them as you had? One of the best ways of honouring your memory would be for someone to take over the care of the things which had meant so much to you. So, too, with the saints.

These great and noble men and women of our faith lived selflessly, giving their lives devoting themselves to the service of others. They gave themselves by nursing the sick, feeding the hungry, teaching the poor and the underprivileged, by spreading the Gospel of Christ in foreign, and often forbidding, even, hazardous environments.

Their examples are far too numerous to mention here. Suffice to say, many of them died heroic deaths for what they believed. They were prepared to climb the scaffold, to embrace the stake, to suffer the rack to hang on the cross. They were prepared to suffer any manner of horrific torture and death, rather than deny their faith.

When we see the examples of their dedication, and when we read the stories of their selfless love and their steadfast faith, stories of such willingness to give their all, to suffer and to die for love of their Lord and God, how can we fail to be moved? How can we be casual about such indescribably momentous things?

We honour the saints best when we love the things they loved, and which meant so much to them, the things to which they devoted their lives. That, I have absolutely no doubt, is exactly what the saints would ask of us!

The causes for which the saints lived and died, have not yet come to completion. (That is always true of all great people.) They gave of themselves in tasks far too big to be finished in a single lifetime. That being so, if their work is ever to be completed, it must be taken on by succeeding generations. And that is where we come in. Their as yet unfinished work for God's kingdom here on earth, has now been passed on, and entrusted to us.

It is certain that we will not finish it in our lifetime either! However, we can take their work forward. Our small, modest efforts, in furthering the causes they believed in, will surely honour all the saints, of all the ages. And in honouring his saints, we give due praise and glory to God on high. Amen.