

## Homily for The Solemnity of All Saints (01/11/20)

Throughout the year our calendar is dotted with the celebrations of saints: some lived at the same time as Christ, others lived in our own lifetime, and all the ages in between. They are a mixed bag of children and seniors, clergy and lay people, rich and poor, whose holiness showed itself in a wide variety of different ways. But they are not really a representative sample of the Christian faithful. If you were a king or a queen and your life displayed heroic virtue, someone would almost certainly notice and set you on the path to canonization. If, however, you were an insignificant peasant on a farm in the middle of nowhere long before modern communication, no-one would know about your holiness; this is the feast day of just such people, the little ones. If you were a Pope or even a bishop and your holiness was exemplary, someone would notice and start up a process; but a simple priest of great holiness in a small village far from anywhere would go unnoticed, so this day is for him, too. And for all the religious whose sanctity is lived in everyday life, this is their day, as well. This is the patronal feast of the little ones, the unnoticed, the ordinary people who will never have a biography written about them, but whose goodness is carefully noted in the records of Heaven.

Thinking about these little ones, the saints who are particularly close to the heart of God because they had little or no reward on earth for their goodness, we might ask ourselves: What does it take to make a saint?

As I have said before, the saints are not people who were born holy, with a particular talent for sanctity. They were not talent-spotted and sent to a special school where they could be fast-tracked. They are all much more ordinary than that, just like us. What the saints do have, however, is a clarity of vision that enables them to see what really matters, and what does not. And because they can make the distinction between what really matters and what does not, they do develop the knack of putting themselves in exactly the right place to encounter the beauty, love, truth and mercy of God, again and again and again. They become, more and more, people who are used to living in the presence of God. And people who become used to living all the time in the presence of God become more and more holy, because they become more and more like God; 'we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is'. And so the change from living in the presence of God on earth to living in the presence of God in Heaven gets smaller and smaller; they become more holy, more suitable to become citizens of Heaven.

What does it take to become a saint? It takes a clarity of vision that refuses to be distracted by the trivial and irrelevant, however enticing they may be. This unlocks for us the chance to be always in the right place at the right time to catch a glimpse of Christ as he passes by, just as Zacchaeus did when, in a moment of inspiration, he discarded all the irrelevant things, climbed up a tree, and watched out for the Lord. Let us pray for the discernment and the wisdom to see more clearly what things will matter in the light of eternity, and what things are just window dressing.

The saints, both the great and the unknown, all share a gritty determination to keep on the move, not to settle for a tolerable life but to strive always for a good one. The beatitudes carry with them a heavy sense of movement, a dynamic life. 'How happy are the...' really means something much more like 'Moving steadily towards their goal are those who...'. The saints are people who know that the world is not as it should be – and of course they know that even their own lives are not as they should be, but this dissatisfaction is not something paralyzing, it is something that goads them to push harder. The blessedness that the saints want is the blessedness of knowing that all is well, that all is just as it should be, and this is a longing for Heaven, the first and only place where we shall have that glorious experience that we can see all is just as it was always meant to be. Until we see that, we must develop a thirst for it, a deep longing, and never let our senses be dulled so that we settle for something less.

On this patronal feast of the little people, the unknown holy ones, let us pray that we may have the wisdom to see more clearly the things that really matter, so that we can put ourselves again and again in just the place where we will encounter God; and let us pray for the energy and the drive to remain dissatisfied with a world where all is definitely not as it should be, so that we can work with tireless enthusiasm for a world ready to be presented to God the Father, a world of blessedness, a world where all, at long last, is well.