

Homily Sunday 1st November, 2009.

Solemnity of All Saints

Mass Readings: Apocalypse 7:2-4, 9-14; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12.

A shocked and frightened family was standing on the pavement in front of their house, watching the firemen swarming in and out. It was very cold on a late winter's evening. A fire had started in the kitchen, and water and smoke were ruining the downstairs of their home. What a mess awaited their going back inside. Suddenly a pizza delivery van pulled up next to the curb, and a young man jumped out carrying a large pizza. The father of the family looked up angrily and said, "Look, I'm afraid you've got the wrong address, none of us has ordered a pizza, and we've got this to deal with, and besides my wallet is there inside the kitchen." The pizza man smiled and said. "Oh, I know you didn't order a pizza, but it's really cold and I just saw you standing there and had to do something. There's no charge, just take it, you might need something to eat." And with that he returned to the van and drove off. How many saw the fire and just shook their heads, or drove on? How many saw people in need? At least one young man saw, and decided to do something about it. This qualifies him as a saint, at least for a day. We can remember the words of Jesus: *"Lord when did we see you hungry and gave you something to eat, or thirsty and give you something to drink?.....And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of these, the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me." (Matt 25:40)*

Origen of Alexandria, a 3rd century Father of the Church, once remarked that holiness is seeing with the eyes of Christ. There is so much around us that we cannot change immediately. Yet our faith fundamentally changes our way of seeing things. It can't always alter the facts of how things are, but it can certainly alter the way we view those facts, and that in itself makes a huge difference.

A saint is a person who is learning to see with the eyes of Christ. A saint is not like a piece of fine porcelain, or a finished product of a work of art that we can put on the mantelpiece or hang on the wall to be admired. Human beings are for ever in

the process of becoming, because God is infinite, and there is always more to be discovered about Him. Even the most recognised and venerated of saints are in the process of sanctity still. Holiness is not a destination that we at sometime may reach perhaps, so much as an invitation to see quite differently, an invitation to which we daily surrender, in the most ordinary circumstances of life.

Today's text from Matthew begins with the word 'seeing'. "*Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up the hill.*" (Matt 5:1) That doesn't simply mean that He noticed a lot of people. It is that, but much more. He saw deeply, to another level. He didn't see, as some of the religious leaders saw, and complained, that the crowd was simply a rabble who knows nothing of the Law, but He saw sheep without a shepherd. A particular example of this is given in the encounter between Jesus and a street prostitute in Luke's gospel. Jesus is seated at supper in the house of a Pharisee called Simon. A woman comes in and Simon secretly despises her, and mistrusts Jesus prophetic ministry because he assumes that Jesus obviously doesn't know what sort she is. Seeing his thoughts, Jesus remarks to Simon – "You see this woman," (Luke 7:44) and then He goes on to describe how she welcomed Him in a way that Simon himself didn't. Of course, Simon hadn't seen this woman at all. He hadn't seen who Jesus truly was or the woman with all her needs, her suffering, her poverty, her history, her longings. He only saw a whore. Jesus saw something quite different. He saw *her*, and said of her that she must have been forgiven much for having such a loving heart. That's holiness, that's what it means to be a saint, to see like that.

In the beatitudes what Jesus is referring to in these blessings and joys, is really an acknowledgement of the deep and irrefutable happiness of those who see differently. The poor in spirit, the gentle, the mourners, those who hunger and thirst for justice, the merciful, and the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted in the cause of right – all have come to see differently. And the real blessing is that they are the ones who are actually living in the real world. This is important. The common view today might be that the beatitudes, with the qualities just mentioned, are for those living in cloud cuckoo land. They would tell those who follow such values to 'get real.' People say Christianity is irrelevant. I would say to them – "supposing everyone lived like this!" It's rather the dismissal of the beatitudes that's unreal, for actually that's the hideout of those who live by fear, all

those who live for the pursuit of anything money, especially a lot of it, can buy. They are in the cloud cuckoo land of the unreal world. *“You fool, this very night your soul may be required of you, what good will all your riches be to you then?”* (Luke 12:20)

The hard thing about all of this of course, is that you and I have, for the most part here, been born and brought up and live in a land almost entirely committed to the maintenance of blindness, where dissident images of the poor, the dying, the homeless, the unborn, the vulnerable, also those who are joyful and confident about their Christian faith, are subtly filtered out. The beatitudes are from an entirely new place, the heart of God.

Jesus offers an entirely new way of seeing the world, and everything in it, from that place, from the heart of God. In this He is revolutionary and subversive. This we are called to share with Him. The Church is called into being to embody, and to be for ever committed to, the promotion of His vision. The Church is a radically revolutionary and subversive movement. Belonging to it will hurt and be costly – for belonging to Christ if our belonging is real will most certainly be so. Yet we are in great company.

On All Saints Day we remind ourselves that those whose memory we honour stood in their day where you stand now, people of their own time, caught up in the events of their time, fallible, vulnerable, intensely human, since that is what God’s grace makes us – more human not less, and we celebrate and venerate their inspiration. In their honour, this month, if you can, take up a biography of a saint. It will be good to see they were in many ways every bit like you and I are. St. Teresa of Avila found prayer times boring, Francis of Assisi found the friars hostile, St Therese frequently dozed off in the chapel, Clare found the bishop and the clergy tedious, the apostles found each other a pain in the neck, Augustine found chastity a nightmare, the Blessed Virgin found God’s messages deeply disturbing, and they all found Jesus absolutely captivating and convincing.

Take some time this week, I suggest, to let yourself be seen by Christ, and this very simply. Just plonk yourself down in front of Him like a child before its mother. Enter

into this type of prayer at some point this week. He sees us always, but let yourself see yourself as being seen by Him. This is what is involved in embracing the path to holiness, to which all of us are called. He knows what we need before we ask Him, and sees us infinitely more clearly than we see ourselves.

I suggest there is no better form of prayer that enables us to deepen our sense of who we truly are before Him, of being seen by Him, and therefore coming to see the world and everything in it differently than prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Try and make regular visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and simply let Him see you, so that you can more clearly come to see yourself and all others in Him. All Saints' day is a celebration of what He can do with anyone who is prepared to follow Him, whoever, whenever, however; who has accepted the invitation that was sent out to come to the wedding party, even if they have had to be dragged in from the hedgerows. (*Matthew 22:9*) This week, everyday, in whatever life throws at you, its choices and challenges, its demands and their accompanying loneliness, know that He will be there, as He was with those we now remember as saints. As I say, during November I recommend you read the life of one of the saints. Take that person as your guide for helping you to see more clearly.

"Master where do you live?"

"Come, and you will see." (John 1:38-39)