

## **The Feast of All Saints**

**Revelation 7:2-4,9-14; Psalms 24; I John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12**

The journey of faith is not easy. While this side of heaven has amazing blessings, it also has great challenges. The journey has been especially challenging for many people in this time of global pandemic, contentious presidential election and racial tension, conflict and unrest. Yet, today, I find great comfort in God's words and the celebration of all Saints Day.

Our Scripture readings and the Feast of All Saints, offer us two fundamental and foundational realities for the journey of faith: 1) We Are Eternally Loved, and 2) We Are Not Alone!

Contemplating these two realities can encourage and enliven our faith and help us not lose heart in the face of many uncertainties.

We are dearly, eternally, and profoundly loved. The apostle John writes in I John, "See what love God has for us that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are!" We are God's beloved children. We are in the heart of God. We are in the mind of God. We are His beloved. In the Gospel of John, we hear, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son so that whoever believes in him would not perish, but have everlasting life." God loves us! God loves you! God loves us so much that he made a way through the cross for us to have everlasting life and be with God forever. God loves us and wants to be with us for all eternity.

Think about those you love. You want to be with them forever. One of the great pains of death is that our loved ones are not with us physically. We miss them. Yet, the Christian hope and promise is that those who have died in Christ and who have been redeemed by God's mercy are alive forever. Paul says it this way, "If God is for us, who can be against us...For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:31, 38-39).

Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God defeated the power of death and opens the door to eternal life. God loves us eternally and has provided eternal life so that whether we live or whether we die, we are with the Lord.

We get a glimpse of God's eternal provision and God's desire to be with us forever in the vision he gave the apostle John in our first reading. John writes,

"After this I had a vision of a great multitude,  
which no one could count,  
from every nation, race, people, and tongue.  
They stood before the throne and before the Lamb,  
wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands.  
They cried out in a loud voice:  
"Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne,  
and from the Lamb."

All the angels stood around the throne  
and around the elders and the four living creatures.  
They prostrated themselves before the throne,  
worshiped God, and exclaimed:  
"Amen. Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving,  
honor, power, and might  
be to our God forever and ever. Amen."

This vision uplifts my spirits. It speaks to me of God's great love. It speaks to me of God's desire to be with us forever. Not only does it speak of God's love, it also speaks to the reality that we are not alone.

God is with us eternally, but so are a multitude of saints, "the number of which no one can count." We are not alone!

I will never forget the first time I heard the Litany of the Saints sung in Mass. I was moved to tears at the overwhelming reality that I was not alone. There is a host of angels and saints alive and well in heaven who are praying for us and who are on our side.

What I find in the Catholic Church and what resonates in my heart and spirit is the truth that the veil between heaven and earth is very thin. The angels and saints are alive in heaven and we have access to them. We are all on the same team,

with the same goal and desire to love God and be with God forever. Just as we ask other Christians to pray for us this side of heaven, we are invited to ask the saints to pray for us from heaven. Again, we are not alone. We have a whole cloud of witnesses who are with us and for us.

The author of the book of Hebrews writes, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

This great cloud of witnesses are all the saints. Again, the saints are with us and for us. We are not alone. The saints help us on our journeys of faith so that we can run with greater support and encouragement the race set before us.

The saints pray for us and encourage us to be saints, to be the best version of ourselves. I believe the saints point us to Jesus and Jesus points us to the saints. Jesus wants us to learn from each other and be encouraged by those who have gone before us in courage, faith, hope and love. To be encouraged by the saints "who have washed their robes in the blood of the lamb."

In light of All Saints Day and our Gospel reading, Pope Frances writes: *"The Solemnity of All Saints is "our" celebration not because we are good, but because the sanctity of God has touched our life. The saints are not perfect models, but people through whom God has passed. We can compare them to the Church windows which allow light to enter in different shades of color. The saints are our brothers and sisters who have welcomed the light of God in their hearts and have passed it on to the world, each according to his or her own 'hue'. But they were all transparent; they fought to remove the stains and the darkness of sin, so as to enable the gentle light of God to pass through... Today in the Gospel, Jesus addresses his followers, all of us, telling us we are "Blessed" (Matt 5:3). It is the word with which he begins his sermon which is the "Gospel," Good News, because it is the path of happiness. Those who are with Jesus are blessed; they are happy. Happiness is not in having something or in becoming someone, no. True happiness is being with the Lord and living for love... The ingredients for a happy life are called Beatitudes: blessed are the simple, the humble who make room for God,*

*who are able to weep for others and for their own mistakes, who remain meek, fight for justice, are merciful to all, safeguard purity of heart, always work for peace and abide in joy, do not hate and, even when suffering, respond to evil with good...This is how the saints are: like everyone, they breathe air polluted by the evil there is in the world, but on the journey they never lose sight of Jesus' roadmap." (Pope Francis, November 1, 2017)*

In this coming week, with the election and all the uncertainties surrounding the outcome, let us commit to praying for our country and spending some intentional time contemplating two deep and profound truths in Jesus' roadmap: We are eternally loved and we are not alone!

I will pray for you and ask that you pray for me.

God bless you in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Deacon Steve