

All Saints

A man and his girlfriend were engaged to be married. Before they could tie the knot they both died in a car crash. When they got to heaven they met St Peter at the gate. They pleaded with St Peter to find a minister and allow them to get married. Each year they made the same plea and each year they were refused. Finally after 10 years they were allowed to marry.

After several years they realized it wasn't going to work and this time pleaded with St Peter to allow them to divorce. He said, "Are you kidding? It took us 10 years to find a minister that was in heaven to marry you, how long do you think it's going to take to find a lawyer?"

Why is it necessary to celebrate the feast of all saints? All year round we are celebrating feasts of saints: Thomas Aquinas, January 28; Augustine of Hippo, August 28; Theresa of Lisieux, October 1, etc. Why then is it necessary to set apart a day to celebrate the feast of All Saints? I can think of two important reasons.

Beside the handful of saints whose feast days we celebrate on specific days in the year, there are countless other saints and martyrs, men, women and children united with God in the heavenly glory whom we do not celebrate. Many of these would be our own parents and grand-parents who were heroic women and men of faith. Today we keep their honourable memory. In many ways, therefore, today's feast can be called the feast of the Unknown Saint, in line with the tradition of the Unknown Soldier. We celebrate what the Revelation of St John the Divine calls "**a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands**" (Rev 7:9).

This celebration gives us a peek into our eternal destiny. The saints we celebrate were men and women like us. Where we are now they used to be, and where they are now we hope to be someday. As Christians we know that a person's life story is not limited to what happens to them between the day they are born and the day they die. Our story starts before we are born, at our conception, and goes beyond the day we die, to all eternity. That is why we do not simply forget people after they die. Didn't St Theresa of Lisieux say that she would spend eternity doing good on earth? In our mortal eyes she is dead and gone. But in the eyes of faith we know that she is alive now more than ever, because she is now fully alive in God. She is now more alive than we are because the life she now enjoys can no longer be diminished by suffering, disease and sin, or death.

Unfortunately, our reaching the fullness of life with the saints does not happen automatically. "**Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven**" (Matthew 7:21). How do we live a life of doing the will of our heavenly Father? The answer is given us in this day's gospel, the Beatitudes, where Jesus gives his followers a road map to a happy eternity. All the saints we celebrate today walked the hard and narrow path of the Beatitudes to arrive at heavenly bliss. On the feast of All Saints the church invites us and challenges us to walk the walk, not just to talk the talk, of the saints.

The Beatitudes propose to us a way of life, inviting us to identify with the poor, those who mourn, the meek, and those who hunger and thirst after justice. They challenge us to be compassionate people, to be men and women who are pure in heart, and to become the peacemakers in our dealings with one another, in our families and in the society at large, even when this approach to things exposes us to ridicule and persecution. None of the saints we celebrate today had it as their aim in life to amass wealth, to acquire power or to gain popularity. Rather they looked forward to the eternal reward which God gives to his faithful ones at the end of this short earthly life of illusion.

Today we are invited to walk the path of the saints, the way of the Beatitudes. The way is narrow and hard. We need faith and courage to walk it. The example of the saints and their prayers encourage us and help us on. St Augustine found it hard to live the Beatitudes, but when he read the lives of the saints he said, "What these ordinary women and men have done, why not me?" Why not? Faith assures us all who heed the call of Jesus and live the life of the Beatitudes that at the end of life we shall, together with all the saints, hear the consoling words of the Lord, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joys of your master" (Matthew 25:21).