HOMILY FOR ALL SAINTS DAY – 2015

All Saints Day is intended to honor all who have come to share in the heavenly life – and not just those that the Church has declared to be saints. All who have completed their journey with Christ into the Promised Land of heaven are part of that vast throng described in our reading from Revelation that is gathered around God’s throne. They are the ones who, according to our reading from First John, have come to bear a striking resemblance to the God in whose image they were created. The Church encourages us to be mindful of them because they are great models for us and powerful intercessors. That’s why we have so many days on our Church calendar when particular saints are remembered. But the reason we have this catch all day – this All Saints Day -- is so that those who are not among the hundreds that the Church has declared to be saints can also be honored. This is primarily the day of the unknown saint – that is, those who are not known by the whole Church.

I like this focus – the honoring of the unknown saints -- because I believe that many of those saints who are not known by the whole Church have been known by us. I mean, if the beatitudes we heard in our gospel today have been chosen because they give us a pretty good idea of who it is that makes it into the company of the saints, I have good reason to believe that many of my family members and friends are among them. And I’m sure that many of yours are too.

We have known the blessed poor in spirit – those who were not obsessed with worldly wealth because they knew their lives depended on God. We have known the blessed mourners – those who were grieved by the many ways that people have turned away from God and have done hurtful things. We have known the blessed meek – those who lived lives of humble service even though others may have taken advantage of their goodness at times. We have known the blessed ones who hungered and thirsted for righteousness – those who had such a strong desire to live in right relationship with God and God’s people. We have known the blessed merciful – those who never had a bad word to say about anyone and were always supportive of those that many had given up on. We have known the blessed pure of heart – those whose moral uprightness seemed to extend to the very depths of their being and was reflected in the many good things they did and said. We have known the blessed peacemakers – those who were always trying to help people get along with one another and to bring people into the wholeness and harmony that God desires for all. And we have known the blessed persecuted – those who were treated badly by others because they chose to bear witness to their faith in Christ, yet still had a joy about them because they trusted in the promises of God. We have all known such people, though perhaps they lived the beatitudes in ways that were a bit more subtle than many of those the Church has declared to be saints.
Whenever we celebrate the Feast of All Saints, I always think of the song, *When the Saints Go Marching In*. “Lord I want to be in that number” – this does describe the desire of my heart. I do want to be in that number. And I’m sure that most of you feel the same. But I have to admit that I’m often a bit nervous about how I’m going to get there and who I might be meeting along the way. I don’t know about you, but the thought of meeting God or Jesus can be pretty overwhelming for me at times. It’s not that I don’t want to meet them and to share life with them forever. It’s just that their immense holiness and power sometimes frightens me a bit, even though I do trust in their love for me, as much as I can trust anything.

But for me, the thing that makes the thought of joining all those gathered around God’s throne a lot less overwhelming and a lot more desirable, is my belief that I know some of those who will be waiting to greet me there. I know they know me and they love me. So my hope is that they will be the first to meet me. I mean, just as it’s a lot less overwhelming to meet some great and powerful person if you’re accompanied by a good friend who happens to know that person, so it’s a lot less overwhelming to think that my mom, my grandparents, or one of my aunts or uncles -- those family members and friends that I have always looked to for comfort, courage, and strength -- will present me to God rather than me just going in on my own. Now I know this may sound silly coming from a person of faith, but my guess is that many of you feel the same.

Actually, I think that this is why so many people are given experiences of seeing a loved one who has already passed on when they are near death. So many times I have heard people say a day or even just a few hours before they pass on, “my mother is here,” “my husband is here,” “my grandfather is here,” or “my aunt is here.” I know many of you have witnessed this too. It seems that quite often dying persons are visited by deceased loved ones, though they remained unseen by us.

I truly believe that God gives this gift to people because it makes passing through the valley of the shadow of death a lot less frightening and a lot more appealing. These saints that are unknown to the whole Church but are well known by us have a very special role to play and very important work to do – that is, to help us on our way to heaven. And our remembering them truly does help us to sing with much greater enthusiasm, “Lord, I want to be in that number!” And it is people like this that we remember and honor in this memorial Mass today.

Fr. Rod Damico
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