

All Saints Day – 2022

“Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, it has not so much as dawned on us, what God has prepared for those who love Him.” So St. Paul summarizes the heart of this celebration of all the saints ... those officially canonized by the Church, but also those of every time and place who are in the presence of God’s love and peace forever. The door to endless and perfect joy is held open for all of us by the death and Resurrection of Jesus, and ***we cannot even adequately imagine what that future will mean for us.*** And, as St. Augustine once put it so well, it is no small reason for joy to have a hope that will one day be fulfilled. The saints model for us that joy that already changes everything – not only some day, but already now. The problems of the world weigh upon our spirits, as they did for those we honor today; but we learn from their lives how to respond to those troubles with compassion and hope in a Kingdom that does not belong to this world, and a Light that rose from death and will not be overcome. We too are each invited to this great reunion with the whole family of God, the perfect Communion of life and love that is already anticipated in the Eucharist. Every day, it grows closer, and that gives us daily new hope.

The saints come from all different walks of life, from every age of Christianity, from every field of human endeavor and every vocation. They are young and old and everything in between. They are kings and queens, husbands and wives, farmers and laborers, people both famous and obscure. ***But what they all have in common is that they loved the same Jesus Christ we love; they believed in the same Scriptures we still read; and they were nourished by the same Eucharist we still share.*** They knew all the same struggles we know. They worked for a living, paid taxes, changed diapers, disciplined children, told jokes, prayed and laughed and cried. Sometimes they stumbled along the path to holiness, but in humility, they let Jesus help them back to their feet. They were just like us, and we belong to the One Living body of Christ with them.

Today, I think of Bob, a man I met only toward the end of his life. Bob was one of those people who faced some developmental challenges in life, but through honest hard work and the support of family and friends, he enjoyed success and was a joyful person. A young man who had befriended him at work called me to visit him in the hospital, where I offered him the Anointing of the Sick and we prayed together. He admitted that he was scared to think of dying. I told him Jesus tells us that there is a place prepared for him, that he will be standing among the saints ... maybe behind Francis of Assisi, between Therese of Lisieux and Thomas Aquinas, standing in front of Catherine of Siena. I will never forget how his face suddenly lit up, and he asked: "Really? A place for me?" I assured him it was so. I learned the next day he had died a few hours later ... at peace, looking forward to that place with God.

The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us of that extraordinary fact that we are also all part of one living Body, one unfolding plan; and that, great as the Saints are, "God had foreseen an even better plan, so that *without us they were not to be made perfect.*" We need the saints to pray for us and model for us the way; but they also need us to complete their number. "*See what love the Father has bestowed on us, that we may be called children of God. Yet ... [along with the saints] ... that is what we are.*"