

Homily for All Saints Day

November 1st 2019

On many days during the Church Year we think of specific saints with names like Augustine, Aquinas, Catherine and Therese, John Paul II and John Henry Newman, one of our newest saints. Today is the day when we think, not of one specific saint, but All the Saints. As we celebrate All Saints Day, we are to remember that you and I are also called to be saints in the making, boys and girls, teens and adults who are discovering what the 19th Century French Man named Leon Bloy discovered. Bloy grew up in a household deeply influenced by the spirit of the French Revolution – his was an atheist earlier in life and disdained the Catholic Church. But around mid-life he had a Parisian neighbour who embodied authentic Catholicism. With time, Bloy's developing relationship with his neighbour resulted in Leon's conversion. This man who had been so hostile to the Church and dismissive of God wrote these words after becoming Catholic:

“The only real sadness, the only real failure, the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint.”

Listen to the emphasis:

Only real sadness, only real failure, only great tragedy is not to become a saint. Sadness, failure and tragedy. Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) was a friend of Leon Bloy. As a younger man in his 20s he pledged that if he couldn't discover the meaning of life within a year, he would kill himself. He was caught up by the materialism and relativism of the early 20th century thus concluding life is worthless. Unless he could find meaning, it would lights out, curtains. Bloy's influence on Maritain was great. He did not kill himself as a twenty something, , and lived to 91, becoming one of the most respected Catholic Philosophers of the 20th century.

So, what is it the Saints embody that can inspire us? Three things. They found their centre; they knew they were sinners and understood their life was not primarily about themselves.

- The Centre
- They are sinners
- Life is not about themselves

Today's Gospel reading is all about finding the true centre of our lives – Jesus Christ. These sayings of Jesus are known as the Beatitudes. The word beatitude sounds and looks like the word beauty. These beatitudes are short sayings, also called maxims. A maxim is a saying that expresses a general truth and rule of conduct. Here are some well-known Maxims:

- A chain is only as strong as its weakest link.
- A friend in need is a friend indeed.
- A good beginning makes a good ending.
- A man is known by the company he keeps.
- A watched pot never boils.
- Absence makes the heart grow fonder.

- Actions speak louder than words.

Now these 8 maxims of Jesus, these beatitudes, are sayings that describe the beauty experienced by those who are learning to make Jesus the centre of their lives. To be poor in spirit is to realize on my own I can never become a saint. This leads in turn to kind of sorrow because we realize how sad life is apart from God. The meek are people who are discovering to surrender to Jesus and are looking to him for guidance in their lives. Such people will then hunger and thirst to desire to become saints, they will learn to treat others with mercy, and will in turn choose the way of purity of heart – which is a kind of beauty, where we reflect in our lives the heart of Jesus so that in turn we can become peace makers. A man or woman of peace is discovering that to make Jesus the centre of our lives allows us to have a meaning and purpose in life best called “peace”. When we know this peace we want to share it with others, and so are known as ‘peacemakers.’”

This is the a truly beautiful life but one that people who don’t have Jesus as their centre will ridicule and even treat you with disrespect. Some of the Saints were so hated that they became martyrs – were killed for their faith, because the world apart from God finds the beauty Jesus speaks of in his maxims – his beautiful sayings ugly. That is why Jesus says, people will revile us, and even persecute us for desiring the way of sainthood.

Now here is the second thing saints in the making discover, when we see our lives in the light of the Beatitudes we discover that there is much in our lives that is well kind of ugly – dirty, what we call sin. That which is ugly and not beautiful.

My office here at St. Peter’s looks to the West. In the afternoon as the fall sun hits my windows, I noticed how dirty they were. The sun showed up all sorts of spots that I wouldn’t see when looking out the same window at nighttime. I am so thankful that one of the people who works with me here at St. Peter’s, her name is Annie, cleaned my window a couple of weeks ago. Now when the sun shines on it, there aren’t all those spots that where there before she cleaned it.

Saints in the making know that we are always in need of cleaning because of the effects of sin. That is why people who want to become saints go to Confession regularly. Confession does to our souls, what Annie did to my window, it wipes it clean. But just as my window will need to be cleaned again before long, so too with our souls. For as St John said in our second reading, those who are growing in becoming Saints want to be pure as Jesus is pure – that is clean. This in turn leads to my third point.

Saints in the making are discovering their true centre, know they are sinners and know that their lives are not primarily about themselves. Rather we discover that in learning to live in the service of God and others we find the deepest meaning in life. We read in 1 John that when we see Jesus, we will be like him because we will see him as he really is. Have you ever thought about that? One day you will see Jesus – now we see him in the Eucharist - which is practise for that day when after you and I die we will really see Jesus and we will be like him. In other words we will have become saints. John, who not only wrote our second reading, also wrote our first reading from Revelation. There we read of more people than can be counted who are before God, worshipping him night and day. Worship is what we do most especially at the Eucharist. When

we live with the Mass as the centre of our lives, we can then go from our worship out into the world living in the service of others. All the saints did this. They chose to love and care for others in such a way that they are remembered, sometimes hundreds of years after they died and went to heaven.

St Mother Theresa understood this so well. She used to say: “The Mass is the spiritual food that sustains me—without which I could not get through one single day or hour in my life,” she said.

The Eucharist was the spiritual hinge that united her mystical life of prayer to her daily devotion to the poor and outcast. Visitors to her home for the dying in Calcutta were often surprised that their first stop was the eucharistic chapel. Jesus, she would tell them, was “the Master of the house”—and his presence was the reason for her work.

So on this All Saints Day remember that what matters most in your life is to become a Saint. What is a saint? A person learning to live the beautiful way of the beatitudes and so be centred in Jesus, whose light shows us that while we are still sinners, we can discover what it means to be forgiven our sins so as to live for others and not for ourselves.