

Homily for All Saints Day

How Many Years Have you Lived?

St. Jose Maria Escriva, the Founder of Opus Dei, relates the story of a priest he knew named Venerable John Ridaura. Whenever Fr. Ridaura, already advanced in years, was asked “How many years have you lived”, he would reply, with great conviction: “Very few. Only those I have spent serving God”.

What a thoughtful answer. Here was a priest in the twilight of his life honestly able to admit he had spent years in less than complete devotion to God. How easy it is to be Christians and yet live distractedly and without the understanding that our life has purpose in the present because we are confident of our life’s ultimate goal. C.S. Lewis captures how easily we live half-hearted Christian lives in these sober words:

“It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

All Saints Day is a clarion call for us to rekindle our Christian conviction and to admit we are far too easily pleased.

Today we remember those whose sanctity is to inspire us to affirm what matters most in the present life is that we engrave, that we burn upon our souls the conviction that we are called to sanctity and holiness. This invitation is addressed to all people without exception. Sainthood is not for someone else. Sainthood is for you. Sainthood is for me.

So let think about saints for a minute. Saints are not safe! They are like the One who makes them. God is not safe. Peter Kreeft has observed:

“God is not nice. God is not an uncle. God is an earthquake.”

Saints are wild. Saints risk everything on God. Saints are lovers: in love with God (and therefore with God’s children), on fire with God’s fire. That fire is the Holy Spirit.

So let me state it again. The meaning of your life is to be a saint. There is only one tragedy, in the end: for you not to recognize what your life on earth is about – to become a saint.

Remember this, if we are not saints when we die, God will not rest until we are; that is why most of us will probably need purgatory before heaven. All heaven’s citizens are saints. This is why you need to be confident of your life’s ultimate goal if you are to live purposefully in the present. That ultimate goal is vividly presented to us in the lesson from Revelation.

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,

What inspiring language - here is the fullness of Catholic Life! Every nation, tribe and language represented – all dressed in white, the colour of purity and perfection, singing the hymn of salvation. But not only are they dressed in white, they are also waving palm branches. Why palm branches? Such branches were part of a yearly Jewish Festival called Tabernacles. This feast celebrated two things. First it commemorated God's guidance during the forty years of the desert wanderings. Secondly it looked forward to the day when all peoples and nations would worship God in Jerusalem.

Now translate this to our lives. The years in this world are equivalent to the desert wanderings. We are not to be at home in this world. As we live in this world we have in Revelation a picture of what awaits us. Rather than Jerusalem in the Middle East being the destiny of the nations, it is the New Jerusalem in heaven.

But listen to how those who are now in heaven are described at the end of the reading:

These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

The Great Tribulation is a vivid depiction of life in this world. It is clear when reading Revelation that all hell is breaking loose on earth and so many people are distracted and living for all the wrong reasons because of this.

All of us here today are in one way or another experiencing the Great Tribulation. The effects of marital unfaithfulness be it infidelity or an inappropriate emotional intimacy with a person not your spouse. You are dealing with chronic illness or you are struggling with unemployment and poverty. You are challenged by family who do not understand your Catholic Faith and you feel tongue tied and inadequate in trying to explain your faith to them. Perhaps you struggle with really believing the Christian Faith and you are sitting here today wondering if anything Father is saying is credible. Deep in your gut you might be thinking life does not have a purpose or a goal.

Perhaps you are struggling with loneliness. You desire a relationship that could lead to courtship and marriage and yet you find yourself single.

Perhaps you are attracted to the luring and dark side of the internet where the powerful temptation of pornography is so enticing you far too readily succumb to its seductive embrace.

We then think of all of those who faced the systematic persecution of the State and were martyred for their faith or suffered great hardship.

We need to face honestly the challenge given to us in Revelation and also the hope presented to us. The ones who have come through the Great Tribulation, we are told have been made white in the blood of the Lamb. Even in the midst of all of the challenges because of the Great

Tribulation, by being here today you are staying connected to Jesus and his redeeming blood made present to us in the Sacrament. The Sacrament of the Eucharist is the ever present reminder that while we live in the midst of the Great Tribulation we are beloved children of God. Remember how St. John put it in the Epistle.

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

Our baptism is our initiation into the family of God making us his children. Don't forget who you are. The enemy of your soul, the devil, wants you to deny your true identity in the present and so forget about your ultimate goal. This is why St. John reminds us

The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

There are forces at work in the world in opposition to the loving purposes of God. But says St. John, keep your focus on Jesus. This is what the saints have always done. Such a focus says St. John leads us to understand that while we don't fully know in the present what our future life will be like we do know that when we see Jesus we will be like him because we will see him as he truly is.

Remember these encouraging words when the forces of the Great Tribulation seem all too powerful. Remember that because we know our ultimate goal is heaven we can in the present live hopefully.

And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

The saints who have gone before us lived their lives purposefully. We are to do the same. For the life that you are living today and everything you experience today is part of a God ordained plan whereby we will one day be on the other side of the Great Tribulation. Then we will not only sing but know the fullness of these words:

*From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
Through gates of pearl, streams in the countless host,
And singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost:
Alleluia, Alleluia!*