

All Saints' Day

2<sup>nd</sup> November 2014

'What you should want is: to be a saint'

Apoc 7: *a huge number, impossible to count ...*

Ps 23: *such are the men who seek your face O Lord*

1Jn 3: *the love the Father has lavished on us by letting us be called God's children*

Mt 5: 1–12: the beatitudes

The tradition of honouring the saints goes back a long way in the life of the Church, and is a normal and human response to one to whom we look up in our Christian lives. The saints are indeed the 'heroes' of our faith — but not heroes who have achieved this by their own merits. The lives of the saints point away from their own achievements, and point instead towards God: God's grace has won the victory in their lives; God's Spirit has brought them to holiness and to heaven.

No doubt we all have our favourite saints — for some of us that may be the saint after whom we were named; for some of us it may be the saint whose name we adopted at Confirmation; for others it may be a saint connected to our country or town of birth; for others it might be a saint whose life we are in awe of, someone whose life story is so attractive and inspiring. This is important, to *want* to be with the saints, to see their company, the Church, as our home too,

our destiny. But it's important at the same time not to consider sainthood to be far from us, alien to us, beyond us. It is not. When we look at the lives of the saints we see ordinary human beings who have won through, despite their human weaknesses. We should want, with all our hearts, to be like them, to be with them in heaven. We too share their human weaknesses, but we too should have faith that God can overcome in us those weaknesses. Many of the saints' lives started off far from saintly! Think of our own St Augustine. He wasn't even baptized until 32; the constant prayers of his mother over his early decades, and the example of the bishop of Milan, St Ambrose, eventually brought him to see the light of God shining on him with love and persistence. St Ignatius, too, was a soldier not given much to thoughts of a Christian character, until he was wounded in battle at the age of 30, and had time to reflect, read the life of Christ and the saints, and have his life completely turned around; he became the founder of the Jesuits, the religious order to which Pope Francis belongs. This sort of story is repeated over and over again: God works His miracles in the lives of the saints, and turns their lives around, brings them to

achieve great things for others, and to witness to many of the healing, forgiving, passionate love of Christ.

Saints are not plaster-cast statues, but living flesh and blood; men and women who have lived real lives in real situations of challenge in the real world. Often they have overcome huge difficulties and sufferings, by God's grace, constantly turning all things back to Him in prayer and trust. We can be like them! We can have this desire for life, to be a saint!

Our feast day, in this regard, isn't only limited to the named, canonized saints of the Church's declaration. Yes, the Church is right to name saints, those who are without doubt in the glory of heaven. Just recently, as we know, Popes John XXIII and John Paul II were declared saints, after due process and investigation, with the accompaniment of attested miracles. But beyond all these names saints is the "huge number, impossible to count" that we heard of in the first reading, in John's vision in the Apocalypse. Heaven is alive with all those who, dying in goodness, and purified of their sins, are now in eternal rest and happiness with God. They may not be named and held up as canonized examples

of saints, but — please God — many of our deceased relatives and friends are, or soon will be, saints in heaven. They call to us to be with them; we should gaze on that image of heaven and see our home; that place where we should be at home. Are we doing all we can to stay focussed in this life, on getting to heaven, avoiding sin; confessing and being forgiven our failings; keeping to prayer and the sacraments with diligence and love for God? The Beatitudes, which we heard just then from the mouth of Jesus, are an important guide to what it means to attain blessedness. We would do well, this All Saints' Day, to read those words gently again and let them resound in our souls: to be poor in spirit, ... peacemakers, ... gentle, ... hungering and thirsting for righteousness ... so as to have our souls attuned to what blessedness really means.

*Yes, Lord, you give me all the means necessary to be a saint; please let me not ignore Your gift, Your instruction; your sacraments; Your graces. Please let the prayers of the saints inspire me to live a life worthy of a heavenly reward.*