

I speak to you in the name of God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Please be seated.

A few days ago, the Christian Church celebrated All Saints Day and today as the first Sunday following November 1, we also commemorate the full Communion of Saints, including those that we know little about or whose feats are relatively unsung the rest of the year. Today we commemorate their accomplishments but also give thanks for their examples of holiness. If we sum up the overall importance of the saints, it is that they give us real life examples of how to live holy lives in every age and in every century, including this one. According to Catholic tradition, all of the saints are forever spiritually connected to this world and can intercede on our behalf because of a shared communion with Jesus Christ. Many saints have been instated as protectors over particular aspects of life. Some of these we are familiar with, such as while others like St. Vitus who is the patron saint against oversleeping are less well known.

The first evidence of Christians celebrating the saints comes from the second century AD when churches celebrated local saints. Those honored varied by location. As time went on, feast days slowly became more universal, however, with evidence of a general feast day occurring for St Ephrem the Syrian (d. AD 373). All Saints Day was formally established in 609 AD by Pope Boniface IV, although it was then held on May 13. The pontiff also created All Souls Day which is now held one day after the feast of all saints on November 2. The date November 1 was eventually chosen in 835 AD by Pope Gregory III, and it was made a Holy Day of Obligation by Pope Gregory IV in the 9th century. In Eastern Churches, All Saints Day is marked on the first Sunday after Pentecost.

All Saints Day is the modern name attributed to the day, but it was once known in Old English as “All Hallow’s Day” or “Hallowmas,” making the previous day “All Hallows Eve” or Halloween as it is now more commonly

known. “Hallows” is thought to have referred to the saints as they were the “hallowed ones.”

This past week, Pope Francis reminded the world of the significance of All Saints’ Day when he referenced the Gospel reading for this past Friday: *Today...in the Gospel (cf. Mt 5:1-12), Jesus proclaims the identity card of the Christian. And what is the identity card of the Christian? The Beatitudes. It is our identity card, and also the way of holiness...Jesus shows us a path, that of love, which He Himself took first by making Himself man, and which for us is both a gift from God and our response. Gift and response.*

...The Father of heaven indeed offers us His holiness, but He does not impose it. He sows it in us, He makes us taste its flavour and see its beauty, but then He awaits our response. He leaves us the freedom of following His good inspirations, of letting ourselves be involved in His plans, of making His sentiments ours, putting ourselves, as He taught us, in the service of others, with an ever more universal charity, open and addressed to all, to the entire world.

We see all of this in the life of the saints, even in our time. Think, for example, of Saint Maximilian Kolbe, who in Auschwitz asked to take the place of a father of a family, condemned to death; or of Saint Teresa of Calcutta, who spent her existence in the service of the poorest of the poor; or of Bishop Saint Oscar Romero, murdered at the altar for having defended the rights of the last against the abuse of their oppressors. And in this way we can make a list of many saints, many of them: those we venerate on the altars and others, that I like to call the saints “next door”, the everyday ones, hidden, who go forward in their daily Christian life. Brothers and sisters, how much hidden saintliness there is in the Church! We recognize so many brothers and sisters formed by the Beatitudes: poor, meek, merciful, hungry and thirsty for justice, workers for peace. They are people “filled with God”, incapable of remaining indifferent to the needs of their neighbour; they are witnesses of shining paths, possible for us too.

Let us ask ourselves, now: do I ask God, in prayer, for the gift of a holy life? Do I let myself be guided by the good impulses that His Spirit inspires in me? And do I commit myself personally to practising the Beatitudes of the Gospel, in the environments in which I live?

May Mary, Queen of all Saints, help us to make our lives a path of holiness.

In closing, I share this prayer for the saints that was written in this century so that we would always be mindful that saints do continue to walk among us today and that we can always find those holy examples on which we can pattern our own lives if we just look around us.

We give you thanks, O God, for all the saints who ever worshiped you
Whether in brush arbors or cathedrals,
Weathered wooden churches or crumbling cement meeting houses
Where your name was lifted and adored.
We give you thanks, O God, for hands lifted in praise:
Manicured hands and hands stained with grease or soil,
Strong hands and those gnarled with age
Holy hands
Used as wave offerings across the land.
We thank you, God, for hardworking saints;
Whether hard-hatted or steel-booted,
Head ragged or aproned,
Blue-collared or three-piece-suited
They left their mark on the earth for you, for us, for our children to come.
Thank you, God, for the tremendous sacrifices made by those who have gone
before us.
Bless the memories of your saints, God.
May we learn how to walk wisely from their examples of faith, dedication,
worship, and love. Amen.