If we took a poll of this community—don't get nervous, not a political poll, but a liturgical poll—asking what your favorite Church feast is, lots of you would say, Christmas; the more theologically astute might say, Easter; and a few Charismatics might even say Pentecost.

My favorite feast is today, All Saints Day, because it grounds me in the three realities that orient my life and its meaning.

Let me explain.

First: As a member of the Church, the Body of Christ, I always dwell in communion, not only with you and with Catholics around the world. I live in communion with all those who came before me, who handed on to me the gift of faith. Being a member of the Communion of Saints is my most basic self-identity; it's my deepest and truest DNA. My family tree can be traced back, not just to Britain, but to Nazareth and Bethsaida and Capernaum. The Saints are my family of origin.

So this Feast celebrates that my family reunion is not a once-a-year gathering, but my daily reality.

In the Church's funeral liturgy, the preface says that in dying, "for your faithful, Lord, life is changed, not ended;" and the Eucharistic Prayer goes on to say that, in the Father's Kingdom we hope to enjoy forever the fullness of Your glory, when You will wipe away every tear from our eyes." And then, echoing that second reading from St. John, "seeing You, our God, as You are, we shall be like You for all ages and praise you without end."

That's what happens to the Saints, now, even those not officially canonized by the Church.

That hope can falter, even in the most faithful of hearts.

That trust, that our beloved ones now see God face to face, and live, can be sorely tested, when we have to bear the sorrow of surrendering someone to the grave.

But the Feast of All Saints reminds me that indeed life is changed, not ended. I, we, remain in communion, genuine connection, with the deceased. They don't just disappear into the mists of memory; they are alive in Christ. Their lives have not melted into the void. Rather, their histories have found their finality in God. And alive in the infinite God, all our dead are conjoined in the song of God's endless love.

But their song sounds like silence to us, drowned out by our distracted clamor. The Feast of All Saints, however, summons me into the song, the symphony.

Irish spirituality talks about "thin places," where the boundary or veil between our everyday world and Transcendence becomes exceptionally porous and even transparent. In such places, time often feels like it stands still, the ordinary boundaries of this material world shrink and we can experience that deep communion with God.

The Feast of All Saints is for me a kind of "thin place," an invitation both to be ever more conscious of that communion, inherent in our common humanity, that unites all God's children to one another, and the living to the dead; and to dwell in it, here and now.

This Feast invites me to recognize that I, we, always dwell in the "thin place," always live on the border of the Holy.

The second reason I rate this Feast as my favorite is because it is the day after Halloween. In fact, Halloween means, the Eve of All Hallows, All Saints.

Druids believed that the Lord of Death sent demons and goblins to roam the earth on that night. But All Saints proclaims that God's goodness, and not the Evil One has triumphed. Christ, the Lord of Life, has broken the powers of sin and death. The darkness and fear of the night of the dead yields to the dawn of the Sun of Justice.

The resurrection of Jesus promises that all the tombs will be emptied, all those who have gone down to the grave will be summoned into the Light of the Eternal Day of the Lord.

And our saints, for whom we give thanks today, both proclaim and enflesh that victory, as they now are freed from all the constraints imposed by time and space and contingency. They now live unconditionally the very goodness and life of the Triune God. The seeds of immortality we spied in their earthly lives, and deaths now yield the abundant harvest of the coming Kingdom.

That then reveals the third reason I claim this Feast as my favorite: the Saints remind me, us, of our own absolute future. We will be, as another Eucharistic prayer says, "saints among the saints in the halls of heaven."

If each Eucharist is a foretaste of the Eternal Supper of the Lamb, the Feast of All Saints is the foretaste of the Company with whom we will share that Supper, where all will be forgiven, reconciled, and made new, "all tears wiped away" when, as St. Edmund Campion wrote to those who would martyr him, "we may at last be friends in heaven, when all injuries shall be forgotten."

Maybe you don't think of yourself as a saint; you are probably right! But as Thomas Merton noted, "We become saints, not by violently overcoming our own weakness, but by letting the Lord give us the strength and purity of God's Spirit in exchange for our weakness and misery."

And Leon Bloy said, "The only real sadness, the only real failure, the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint."

Becoming a saint does not just mean being formally canonized by the Church; it means fulfilling the ultimate purpose for which you were created and so living in union with God; it means finding your true, authentic self—becoming the exact person God intended you to be.

The old Baltimore Catechism framed it this way: Why did God make me? God made me to know God, love God and serve God in this world, and to be happy with God in the next.

That call to eternal happiness is our call to "be holy as the Lord our God is holy," to become saints; and it is a universal call for every person, not an achievement reserved for a select few.

And this Feast Day echoes that call, as we encounter those who enfleshed it in their lives, and deaths: the Saints.

We sing the hymn, *For All the Saints*; and the saints sing back to us, inviting us into their own song of endless praise of the glory of God.

But their song sounds like silence to us, drowned out by our distracted clamor. So only by their silence can the dead speak to us, and beckon us on our own pilgrimage, deeper into our own poor, dim earthly life, and so finally into the brilliance of God's eternity.

The Saints command us to abandon ourselves by that daring act of love which is faith, faithfulness, so that we too may find our eternal home in God's life.

This Feast means to help us hear the call of the Saints to us, the assuring of their abiding immortal love for us, empowered and purified now by that divine love in which they fully live and move and have their being.

Those are my reasons for celebrating this Feast of All Saints: it makes me live more intentionally my communion with them, it assures me of Christ's victory over sin and death, and it confirms me in my own absolute future, when Christ will seat me, and each of us, with them, at the heavenly banquet.

Future Saints, I rejoice to share this Eucharist with you, and I look forward to sharing with you at the eternal Supper of the Lamb.

And the people of God said, Amen.

All Saints for children's mass

This weekend we remember all the Saints, and tomorrow, All Souls, all those whom we have loved and who have gone home to live with God. We have written the names of a lot of those people in that book you see on that table in front of the altar.

And we are praying that each one of them is becoming a Saint.

Last year a child asked me if you have to be a saint to go to heaven.

It's not that you have to be a saint to go to heaven; it's the other way around; it's **going to heaven that makes you a saint.**

Let me explain, with **three things** to remember.

First, **a saint is someone whom God loves very much and** wants to share God's own life and Spirit with.

Second, **a saint is someone who accepts that free gift from God**, someone who let's God love them very much.

Third, **a saint is someone who shares that love with every other person.**

Let me say just a little more about each of those, to help you remember.

First, **a saint is someone whom God loves very much.**

It all starts with God.

Some people think they have to be perfect, and do everything right, and never get into trouble, and then God will love them. But it's the other way around.

God takes the first step in this friendship, again and again and again.

Sometimes we pay attention to God loving us—that is what we mean by praying and coming to church---but other times we just pay attention to ourselves and getting our own way—that's what we mean by **sin**.

But even when we are not paying attention, even when we sin, and hurt someone else or hurt ourselves, God loves us and reaches out to embrace us and stretch open our hearts so we can receive God's gift of love, God's gift of his friendship.

If you remember nothing else from what I say, if you remember nothing else from all times you come to church, at least remember that **God loves you very very much. Always.**

Second a saint accepts that gift of God's friendship. **A saint lets God love them.**

Some kids, and in fact lots of adults, think that God doesn't really mean it when God says **I love you and want to be your friend**. They think God means somebody else, somebody they think is better than them, or nicer than they are, or "holier" than they are.

They might think, "O God, if you really knew what I'm like or what I've done, you would be mad at me, or you wouldn't like me, because I don't like myself very much."

But that's no true. God **knows** you completely, inside and out, and **loves** you completely, because **you are God's own child**; Jesus is your brother. And what he asks of you is simply **to let him love you,** be your friend, and hold you close.

So if God's first step is to love you, **the second step to being a saint is to say yes to being loved like that.**

Third, **a saint is someone who shares that love** with every other person.

When you really come to know how much God loves you, and you really let him hold you and be friends with you, you are overwhelmed with awe and wonder and gratitude.

You look at yourself in the mirror and say, "God loves me. Jesus is my friend."

It's amazing. It's awesome. It's the best gift anyone could receive.

And you are so amazed and so thankful that **you want to share it with everyone**—with your family and your classmates and with everyone in your life.

And the more you share the friendship of God with others, the more **gratitud**e you feel. **Your heart grows bigger and bigger with the love of God in it.** You become more and more ready to spend eternity with God.

Some day, lots of years from now, someone will write your name in that book. And when God welcomes you to **your real home in heaven** you will indeed be what God always wants for you**; you** will be a saint.

So the three things to remember:

First, **a saint is someone whom God loves very much** and wants to share God's own life and Spirit with.

Second, **a saint is someone who accepts that free gift from God, someone who let's God love them very much.**

Third, **a saint is someone who says thank-you for that gift and then shares that gift, that love with every other person**.

When you get home with your parents, you can ask them to help you understand this a little more, and together you remember how much God loves each of you , and you can let God love you, and you can say thank you together, and you can pray together and share that love with each other. Amen