Homily for the Thirty First Sunday Year A
(Solemnity of All Saints)

Thomas Merton was one of the most influential American Catholic authors of the twentieth century. Shortly after he was converted to Catholicism in the late 1930s, Thomas Merton was walking down the streets of New York with a friend, Robert Lax. Lax was Jewish, and he asked Thomas ***what he wanted to be, now that he was Catholic***. Merton replied, ***"I don't know" but I wanted to be a good Catholic.***

Lax stopped him and said, "What you should say is that you want to be a saint! "Merton was dumbfounded and asked, ***"How do you expect me to be a saint?"***

Lax said: ***"All that is necessary to be a saint is to want to be one. Don't you believe that God will make you what He created you to be, if you consent to let Him do it? All you have is to desire it."*** Thomas Merton knew his friend was right.

Today, we celebrate the Feast of All Saints. We remember not only the famous saints whose names we know, but also countless unknown saints who lived ordinary lives with extraordinary love. They (All Saints) remind us that holiness is not impossible. They were ordinary people who chose to follow Our Lord Jesus faithfully, persevered through trials and remained steadfast in their love for God.

What is the history of the Feast of All Saints. There was a famous pagan temple in Rome called the *'Pantheon*' Which means ***the house of all gods***. *It was given this name because the Roman emperors gathered statues of all the gods and goddesses worshipped in the different countries under the Roman Empire, so that they could all be worshipped in one place.*

By the year 600 or so, *there was hardly any non-Catholic left in or around Rome.* In the year 609, ***Pope Boniface IV 609–610 AD cleared all the statues of Gods and Goddesses from the Pantheon and turned the building into a church dedicated to God in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary.***

Our Lady, famous martyrs and Saints were venerated in this Church, with a feast being celebrated in their honor in Rome on 13May. ***Pope Gregory III (731-741)*** later changed it to November 1st, when his dedicated chapel eventually extended the feast to the whole Church in 837. This feast is therefore more than 1200 years old. This is the small history behind this All-Saints Day.

Now a question comes. Why is it necessary to celebrate the feast of all saints? Throughout the liturgical year, we celebrate the feasts of different saints, for example, Thomas Aquinas, January 28; Augustine of Hippo, August 28; Theresa of Lisieux, October 1, etc. Why then is it necessary to set apart a day to celebrate the feast of all saints? I can think of two important reasons.

One of the reasons is that the calendar has only 365 days. They cannot contain the names of all the saints. So, the Church assigned November 1 as the feast of all these saints who are not known and not officially canonized. Also, there are countless other saints and martyrs, men, women and children united with God in the heavenly glory whom we do not celebrate.

Reasons why we honor saints:

The saints put their trust in Christ and lived heroic lives of faith. St. Paul asks us to serve and honor such noble souls. In his epistles to the Corinthians, to Philip and to Timothy, he advises Christians to welcome, serve and honor those who have put their trust in Jesus. The saints enjoy heavenly bliss as a reward for their faith in Jesus. Hence, they deserve our veneration.

The saints are our role models. They teach us by their lives that Christ's holy life of love, mercy, and unconditional forgiveness can be lived by ordinary people, of all walks of life and at all times.

The saints are our heavenly mediators who intercede for us before Jesus, the only mediator between God and us. (James: 5/16-18, Exodus: 32/13, Jer. 15:1, Revel. 8:3-4,).

The saints are the instruments that God uses to work miracles at present, just as He used the rod of Moses (Exodus), the bones of the dead (II Kings 13/21), the towel of Paul (Acts: 19/12) and the shadow of Peter (Acts 5/15) to work miracles.

The saints encourage us in our own struggles because like us they also endured struggles, they grew from strength to strength. Saint Padre Pio used to tell the people, Pray, Hope and Don't worry. This is how he encouraged the people to trust in the Lord.

Today's First Reading (Revelation 7:2–4, 9–14) gives us a beautiful vision of heaven, where a great multitude from every nation stands before God's throne. It reminds us that salvation is offered to everyone, regardless of race, language, or background. *The people in white robes represent* those who remained faithful to God through their struggles and sufferings. It encourages us to remain faithful to Christ so that one day we may join the saints in His heavenly kingdom.

In today's Gospel, Jesus gives us the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1–12). He shows us the path to holiness through humility, mercy, purity of heart, peacemaking, and faithfulness. *The saints are people who lived these Beatitudes in their daily lives. We honor them because they followed Jesus faithfully, and we ask for their prayers because they are our brothers and sisters in Christ. We do not simply admire the saints; we are called to imitate them. They show us that the Beatitudes are not just beautiful words to hear, but a way of life to follow.*

On this Feast of All Saints, let us pray to all the saints of the Church, known and unknown, asking them to intercede for us before our Lord Jesus Christ, because they are close to Him and enjoy His eternal presence in heaven. May their lives inspire us to pursue holiness, remain faithful to Christ, and never lose sight of our heavenly destination. All you holy men and women, saints of God, pray for us. Amen.