

The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed, Sunday, November 2nd

No matter how many funeral vigils I have presided over, I always like when I go to lead the Rosary to have in my hand a printed copy of the prayers because I always feel that I am just going to forget the words of the Lord's Prayer or the Hail Mary's - even though I have prayed these prayers, thousands and thousands of times. And I think if I called on anyone here to stand up and recite the Nicene Creed, solo [laughter] there might be some difficulty with that. We know the prayers, yet sometimes we forget the words of the prayer under pressure or something like that. Even the Apostles Creed, a little bit shorter than the Nicene Creed, you might have trouble reciting that by heart in front of the crowd.

But I wonder if sometimes that the reason for this phenomenon is that so often we just sort of race through the prayers. We're not always taking much time to consider the words that we are saying. And at the end of the Apostles Creed, we say the words: *I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.* As you well know the beginning of November is all Saints Day, and on the 2nd, we have All Souls Day, so perhaps as we hear those final words of the Creed, our attention is drawn in particular to the phrase "*the Communion of Saints*". And what comes to mind when we consider The Communion of Saints? The first thing we think about is the whole host of souls - angels and Saints - in Heaven praising God for the Trinity, enjoying perfect peace and the light, happiness, satisfaction in the arms of the Holy Trinity.

We all know people who lived good and holy lives here on earth. Perhaps we think of them as people who probably didn't sin much. Or people who were chosen by God and given specific special graces to accomplish certain things, maybe miracle workers, people who went out and preached and baptized thousands and thousands. Whole hosts of extraordinary people in that Communion. I wager that is what we think about when we hear the phrase "*Communion of Saints*."

But if that's all that we think about when we consider the Communion of Saints, then our notion is too small. Much too small because those Heavenly Hosts are part of the Communion of Saints, they are not the only members. If you look at the Catechism - you can fact check me: Items 946 to 962 if you would like. I encourage you to read that section anyway.

Describing this phrase from the Apostles Creed, it says, "*Where we profess belief in the Communion of Saints, it is really a further explanation of the words right before that = the Holy Catholic Church: I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of the Saints...*" The Catechism is saying that the Communion of Saints is the Church. The Communion of Saints is not just some body of souls over there that we look at from a distance and admire. We are part of the Communion of Saints. And while we may squirm if someone ever described us as saints, or we may look at our neighbor in the pew, and say, "Saint?" [laughter], we are part of the community of Saints. The Saints are not only those who achieve moral perfection – the only exception there is the Blessed Mother who was without sin in this life - but look at the lives of the Saints. They were not perfect human beings. So, if our notion of 'saint' is only someone who has achieved perfection, we ought to broaden our understanding of that word.

Perhaps we can say that the Saints are those who, in a very special way, God is drawing to himself. Indeed, in the words of St. Paul to the Romans - He has poured his love into our hearts. Paul writes: *“Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”* How, I ask you, could God, pour out His own self, His own spirit into the soul of a person without that person becoming in some way holy? How does someone who bears the presence of God in their soul, not consider him or herself as Saints? God is accomplishing His purposes, those who have receive the gift of His Holy Spirit, as our will has been formed more and more to the heart of God. That is being worked out in our life day-by-day. To say that we are Saints as I said doesn't mean that we are without sin, but we are engaging in the struggle. We're engaging in God's work of sanctifying us so that our manner of life radiates His goodness and holiness. Works in progress we are, but we are members of the Communion of Saints.

And on All Souls Day, we also recognize in the very particular way that we share communion with those who have gone before us and still await entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. We recognize that, at the time of death, at the moment of death, not everyone has achieved perfection enjoyed by those Saints in Heaven. There is a purification. There is a purging of imperfections and impurities in the soul. And just as we pray for the members of our families each day, you who have children, probably pray for your children each day, I hope you do. Grandchildren, great grandchildren. If your parents are still alive; you pray for our family members, hopefully you pray for your spouse, if you're married. You pray for those with whom we have some connection, some affection, or affiliation, and we pray also for strangers throughout the world, too.

The members of the Communion of Saints who are undergoing their purification in Purgatory need our prayers. We can help them. We ought to be mindful of them and pray for them each day. Just as we recognize that being members of the Communion of Saints in our imperfections, we need the help of others' prayers. We need the prayers of the Saints in Heaven; we need the prayers of our brothers and sisters on earth. We need the prayers of the souls in Purgatory, also. But they cannot pray for themselves. They cannot obtain for themselves the help that they need.

So, today, especially but really, every day we ought to remember, lift up those souls, and ask for God's grace. Ask for great outpouring with love and mercy upon those souls and draw them to Himself.

When it comes to the Communion of Saints, we can broaden our consideration so we not just thinking about the Saints in Heaven, but also remember the Communion of Saints, the Church Suffering, the souls in the Purgatory, and also remember that we are members of that Communion. So, we are engaged in a journey of transformation and sanctification. Remembering that we are called not only called to be Saints, we are actually Saints in the making, if you will, or on the way.