

Appoc 7:2-4, 9-14; Ps 23, 1 John 3:1-3; Matt 5:1-12

'Tell me about the Saints.'

The voice broke in like gunfire on the silence and my dog and I nearly jumped out of our skins.

'Mr. Fox, you nearly frightened me to death', I complained after taking a deep breath. My dog looked suitably unimpressed as he busied himself disentangling himself from the lead.

'Well, you are in a cemetery', replied Mr Fox rather drolly.

My composure regained, I looked at Mr. Fox, He was very grey around the muzzle, now. His fur was slightly matted from the gentle rain that now was falling. He sat very still amongst the tomb stones. He hardly glanced at the dog, who just grumbled and lay down.

'What about the Saints?', I queried?

'Why are they important to you? Please, don't complicate it.'

'I'll try not to.' I paused for a moment before I spoke. *'The Saints are the heroes of the Church. They are people, men, women, boys and girls who have tried with all they have to live like God has asked them to, and they are now in heaven.'* I carried on: *'They have lived lives of heroic virtue; learned how to be truly authentic; they have learned **self-procession.**'*

'What do you mean by heroic virtue?', asked the Fox

'Heroic virtue is the ability to pursue the good one builds and practices in life despite the obstacles that are placed in front of you. So, an example is Elizabeth Leseur, a French lady who lived a life of prayer, attended Mass and served the poor, despite the mockery of her faith by her

atheistic husband. She continued to love him and pray for him despite the obstacles he placed in front of her on both accounts. As an aside: after she died, he read her diaries, converted and became a priest.'

*'I think I understand. But what about **'self-procession'**. Is this like being yourself or autonomy? Are you surprised a fox should know a word like that? 'Autonomy'?*

'A little, but I know you are an intelligent Fox. However, I feel that many people use this word 'autonomy' and like the word 'freedom' do not really understand it beyond what they think they can take from it. It is often used to mean, 'I am my own person, I can do what I like'. Which means 'I am an independent person and so I have the right to do what I like.' Or 'I am free, so I can do what pleases me.'

'Is this not true, then?'

*'No. Not in any manner that allows a person to be prosperous and happy beyond a very limited time and space. Such a view allows you to be destructive, selfish and very tedious to be around. **'Self-possession'** does not mean – in the Christian sense in which I am using it - doing what pleases me in an effort to assert my individuality. **'Self-possession'** means having command of oneself, so that one can then do what one chooses to do. As Christians we say we 'choose' Christ and lead our life accordingly. But, this is not so easy to do if you reflect even for a moment on the whole conduct of your life. St Paul summarised the problem very well in his letter to the Romans:*

*'For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate., ... For I have the desire to do what is right but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.'*¹

¹ Romans 7:15-19

Week 31 Ordinary Time ALL SAINTS - 2025

*This is lack of **self-possession** and the presence of sin. We do not appear to have control of our appetites, our spontaneous desires, or even our thoughts. I cannot even pray without my mind drifting into areas I did not even think it could go. I am not as free as I think I am. I am inhabited by other things. The things I claim to own and which make me free seem to own me. Car, mortgage, job, dreams, success, fame, family, lusts, ego, economic and political dogmas, fashion, anger and laziness. They can consume us, or at least bind us in abject misery and helplessness.*

*God, seeks to free us from this slavery so that each one of us can love Him. So that we can choose Him, **and** follow Him. But to do this, you must let Him work within you and change you, to unchain you from your fear and life-sapping dependencies which you think you cannot live without. This can be painful. It is painful. As you learn to stand up without all the props that hold you up; as you are cleansed of your addictions and lonely self-love; as you learn to breathe clean air of heaven, you gain **self-possession** and see your true self. Then you can freely give your love God and be loved by Him, unhindered by sin. This is the story that each Saint has learned, and it is our story too, if we let it be told.*

'I wish I had a soul', said Mr. Fox with a sigh.

'Maybe you do, Mr. Fox, maybe you do'.

'Goodbye.'

'Goodbye'