

ALL SAINTS

Gospel: Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

REFLECTION 1:

HOW TO BE A SAINT

I’d like to picture to you a few moments of the Late Late Show. Ryan Tubridy announces a great prize – no longer now a cruise in the Caribbean with 10,000 euro in your purse or wallet. This is going to be a mega reward – rather a place or places in heaven for the winners. The home audience is invited to text one of three possible options. To gain the great reward one has to choose the right pathway to Paradise. Will you get there A) By accumulating as much money as possible? B) By being the most popular in one’s community? or C) By abiding by the Commandments and the Beatitudes? I reckon that most of us would opt for the latter one, the Commandments and Beatitudes path.

You see, those we call saints, be they canonised or chosen by popular acclaim, actually share in the happiness of heaven. We, on our part, are called to join them to be, as St. John calls them, children of God. God’s children, being in the family as it were, bear a resemblance to God our heavenly Father. To attain this dignity is our greatest possible fulfilment – it puts all other earthly rewards remotely in the shade. And the way to go about identifying with the Godhead is by being moulded through the Beatitudes enumerated in today’s Gospel – eight in all. Among them Jesus lists a few that relate to our human experience, being peacemakers, being pure of heart and by showing mercy. But there are others that challenge us – blessed, said Jesus, are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are persecuted and insulted. These are the tough ones. Very few of us want to be poor in spirit, to mourn a loved one and ouch! be insulted. The fact is that Jesus saw life as a reality or as the Spanish say ‘The Realidad’ – seeing life’s circumstances in the broader picture – life happening here today. St. John in the first reading describes those who have faced life in the raw. They are, he says, ‘the people who have been through the great persecution and who have washed their robes white again in the blood of the Lamb’ (Apoc. 7:14). While on earth they were the poor in spirit, those who mourned, were persecuted and insulted, and yet bore the heat of the day.

We on planet Earth are pilgrims advancing in faith. God gifts us in our frailty with the power of his grace through our masses and sacraments and prayer and especially the good example of the saints who have gone before us. They are specific individuals who have been redeemed and are saved for all eternity. They made good use of the grace of God available in our world through abiding by the Commandments and Beatitudes. Our prayer today is expressed in today’s offertory plea, ‘Lord, may

the saints already assured of immortality take on in prayer our desire to be with them, assuring our salvation'. Amen.

REFLECTION 1: THEIR REWARD IS GREAT IN HEAVEN

In the year 610 AD, the Roman Emperor Phorcus handed over the title deeds of a large building in Rome to Pope Boniface IV. This huge edifice had in fact been constructed 25 years before Christ by the Emperor Hadrian and was known as the Pantheon (not to be confused with the Parthenon, which is in Athens, Greece, a classical masterpiece of architecture at the heart of the Acropolis). Originally the Pantheon was a temple dedicated to all the pagan gods of Rome.

Subsequently, Pope Boniface dedicated the structure to our Blessed Mother and to all the martyrs. Later on, this dedication was extended to all saints, confessors, virgins, martyrs, and in fact to all holy men and women. It was surely fitting that a temple once dedicated to all the pagan gods should now be dedicated to all the saints.

Today's Feast of All Saints is a reminder to us of that day of dedication, so many years ago. I visited this massive oval shaped building in Rome in 1975. In fact, it is one of the best-preserved buildings of the ancient world. One of the first things you notice about the structure is that it has no windows; light comes through an opening in the ceiling. This aperture lights up the whole structure and casts no shadows.

I believe that we have an important message from today's celebration, especially in relation to the Pantheon, which has such close associations with today's Feast of All Saints. As human beings, we are made up of flesh and blood and at Baptism we were consecrated to Christ. As Paul expressed it, 'you were once earthly and of flesh, but now in baptism you have been clothed in Christ'. Now the saints were those who believed this fact with great conviction, they were indeed, 'clothed in Christ' and they lived out their lives accordingly.

We may not be in a position to imitate them or even to speak like them, but we can nevertheless live out our lives by the fundamental principles that governed them. Like the stones of the Pantheon, their lives as well as ours were given over to the cult of paganism. But then, the change came. Something extraordinary happened, the Spirit of Jesus entered, and they began to live out the Beatitudes we read about in today's Gospel. They were poor in spirit, yet always gentle. They were merciful, peacemakers – they hungered for justice, and right living. Now their reward is great in heaven. There was found in them, a rededication, a turning from the old ways to a new and fresh vision on how to live.