

## Children

Halloween, the Evening of All Hallows, was once a time for Christians to mock the devil by reveling in the triumph of Jesus Christ over evil and death. Dressing up children in costumes was a way of teaching adults. Saints reminded them to be good and ghouls and devils were a reminder that judgement is coming. The children were thanked for the teaching by getting a sweet. After all this is a message for All Saints and All Souls. So kids, your parents and neighbors should thank you for teaching them.

All Saints became a feast in the eighth century and there is no historical evidence to say that it was related to a pagan celebration except that Christians were told that they could enjoy the festivities as long as they didn't worship the pagan gods, showing that the celebration of nature had lost its connection to those pagan gods.

Coming to the new world, the Protestants wanted to do away with Catholic festivals (we are a party people and parties always involved food – that is a tradition we kept from the Jewish apostles.) So they couldn't get rid of Christmas and Easter but they could get rid All Hallows Eve, by changing it into a celebration of the Reformation (Oct 31, 1517 Martin Luther posted his Theses because it was the eve of All Saints. So it became in the new world a celebration of Protestantism. Keeping its old roots of also a celebration of nature with a harvest festival.

What do I have to say, it was our celebration first, so kids remind adults that judgment is coming with your costumes and remind as many as you can so that you collect many sweets and many adults are taught.

I

One of the most rewarding moments of Hospice ministry is the life review. As people talk about their lives, they focus on the highs and lows. The high moments usually involve the person or persons that they love. The low moments involve moments of loss, generally involving the loss of love or meaning in their lives. For many, the highs are the times they meant their soul mate. Moments of loss involve the loss of a spouse or a child. It is evident that moments of loss should involve pain. Parents should never see the death of their child. It is a pain that lacerates their body and their spirit. There is also pain involved in high moments. Can this wonder last? Am I worthy of this most wonderful person?

Death can be a high moment or a low moment. Some people are looking forward to their passing, and others tremble at its coming. But no one gets out of this life except through death. And so far, our only an Old Testament Prophet went on to the afterlife without going through death. Even Jesus went to the next life by going through his death.

One of my favorite pieces of art is Jerry Anderson's "Come unto me." It is a statue of an elderly woman looking backward while moving forward, going through a veil and coming out the other side, and meeting Jesus as a young woman in her prime. Upon my wife's death, I purchased a copy of this to remind me that the ill woman who died went through the veil of death as my young soulmate to meet Jesus. She is joyously going forward to her next life. It is a reminder to us all that the best is yet to come.

This is All Saints' Day. It is a remembrance of the lives of all those saints who served God here . . . and now surround his throne in the New Jerusalem. It would be impossible to improve on the words of St. John writing in the Revelation:

I had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb." All the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They prostrated themselves before the throne, worshiped God, and exclaimed: "Amen. Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving, honor, power, and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen."

Then one of the elders spoke up and said to me, "Who are these wearing white robes, and where did they come from?" I said to him, "My lord, you are the one who knows." He said to me, "These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb." (our reading ends here, but it continues)

For this reason, they are before the throne of God and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger

no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Doesn't that make you want to burst out with a chorus of "Crown Him with many crowns, the Lamb upon the throne"?

There are some who say if this is heaven, I don't want to go because it sounds boring like being in Church forever. This is only one aspect of heavenly eternal life. This of it as those high moments surrounded by the people you love. You will be in the presence of Jesus, who loves you.

All Saints' Day. One of the oldest Christian celebrations. AT FIRST, ALL SAINTS' DAY WAS A CELEBRATION OF THOSE WHO WERE MARTYRED FOR THEIR FAITH. It's important to remember that early Christians often paid a terrible price for this faith we live today. They were tortured, flayed, torn apart by wild animals, and like their Lord, many of them died on a cruel cross--all because they would not renounce the name of Jesus. As early as perhaps 300 years after our Lord's death and resurrection, there was a growing consciousness that these men and women who had given their all for Christ needed to be remembered.

Would it surprise you if I tell you there are Christians even today who are dying for their faith? I don't know how to make that real for us. We live such insulated, protected lives. We find it difficult to relate to people for whom adopting the Christian faith means putting their very lives at risk. Many of us find it difficult to relate to their situation and their willingness to make this sacrifice. We're not sure we could do it. Maybe our souls are at greater risk than we had imagined.

As Allen Boesak of South Africa says: "We will go before God to be judged, and God will ask us: "Where are your wounds?"

"And we will say, "We have no wounds."

"And God will ask, "Was nothing worth fighting for? . . ."

Let me give you but one example of the kind of commitment.

There was a Maryknoll priest less than a decade ago who was released from a Chinese prison. His crime was being a Catholic priest. He had served in a prison that there be comparison would be for those who remember, the prisons where prisoners of war were kept in Viet Nam. All he knew is that he was being taken out, being washed up, and put in a clean prison uniform. He was taken in chains to the airport, and he thought they are moving me to a new prison. The first hint was when they took off the chains in the van and instead of pushing him out the door helped him out. There he was photographers. He was taken back to Maryknoll, where his health was restored. When asked what he wanted to do, he said, go back to China. He wanted to complete the mission that Maryknoll sent him to do. To bring the sacraments to China.

Do you understand that there are people and there are governing authorities around our globe even today willing to punish, imprison, and even martyr Christians for practicing

their faith? One respected publication estimate there were about 100,000 Christians who were martyred throughout the world, and almost 1,400 hundred churches were destroyed. The United States is in that number. More than half of these are Catholic/Orthodox. approximately one out of every 200 Christians can be expected to be martyred during his or her lifetime. (3)

What? You mean there are still followers of Jesus who take his service that seriously? Yes, there are. So on this sacred day, it would be entirely appropriate that we remember their sacrifices. St. John writes about those dressed in white. For many followers of our Lord, the "great ordeal" continues. And many are still willing to answer the call.

It's true. There are still people willing to make the ultimate sacrifice. For a picture of people willing to lay down their lives for a higher good, you and I need only to go back to September 11, 2001. On that terrible day, there were men and women who lay down their lives because they believed there was something more important than personal security and safety.

Father George Rutler ministered to many of the firefighters and rescue workers who worked at Ground Zero the day of the Sept. 11th attacks. Father Rutler says that the workers lined up to receive prayers or the sacrament of confession before they went into the rubble. Many of them took the sacrament of confession because they knew they might not be coming back. As author Peggy Noonan wrote, "The firemen knew exactly what they were running into, knew the odds, and yet they stood in line, received the sacrament, hoisted the hoses on their backs and charged." (4)

Yes, there are still people like that in the world and in our military. We honor the commitment of all those who lay down their lives for a greater good who now surround the throne of God.

BUT WE ALSO CELEBRATE THE PROMISE THIS DAY SIGNIFIES. See how beautifully John puts it, "For this reason, they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

"God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." That's quite an extravagant promise. But it is an inviolate promise to all who serve God.

Let me tell you about Walter Lowen, who lost his wife and wrote something of his experience for us in the Reader's Digest. "Let me tell you," he says, "what the doctor who attended my wife did for me as I stood dazed and lost at the foot of her bed; knowing not only that the 37 years we had together were over, but feeling also that all meaning had gone from life forever. He took my arm and held it for a moment. And then he said in a matter-of-fact voice, "'You'll see her again.' That was all, but that was all I needed to hear." (5)

That's all any of us need to hear. There is a promise extended to all who are part of the family of God. "You'll see her again." "You'll see him again." You're not home yet. Don't lose hope.

All Saints' Day. Theologian R. C. Sproul put it this way, "Recently someone gave me a tape that rehearsed the events that took place in the year of my birth, 1939. One of the events mentioned was the building of the Hearst mansion that was the most elaborate and expensive private dwelling in America. The mansion included over a hundred rooms and cost \$30 million in 1939. The gold fixtures in it were spectacular. But," says R. C. Sproul, "the Hearst mansion is a doghouse compared to the New Jerusalem." That's the description we get from John's Revelation. We celebrate the lives of those who served God on earth and now surround God's throne. And we look forward to the day when we will one day join them in the heavenly celebration.

Last thought, this time of praising God in heaven is only one view. We also have that of a banquet. We also have the image of the intercession of saints. Poor St Anthony is always interceding for lost objects. Those who have gone before us can intercede for us. Some of you are working those saints in heaven a lot.

Heaven is exciting with work, with family and friends living in God's love. All probably know how wonderful it feels to be loved, and that is what heaven is life with God's abundant love.

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2. Jesus Freaks, compiled by dc Talk and The Voice of the Martyrs (Tulsa: Albury Publishing, 1999), pp. 181-182.

3. Emphasis, Sept/Oct 2001, p. 47.

4. "Like troops before battle" by Peggy Noonan, OpinionJournal.com, Nov. 23, 2001. Quoted in Good News, Mar./Apr. 2002, p. 11.

5. "The Problem of Grief" by Dr. John A. Redhead, Jr.

6. Surprised by Suffering, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL, 1988, p. 164.

Il Fr Desiano

Would you like to be a saint?

Would you like to be blessed?

Would you like to be happy?

These three words seem to say different things to us; they have a different feel. But, in reality, they are all about the same idea, to experience the fullness of life and love, to live in the Kingdom of God. We put our different nuances on them and sometimes distort them. "Saint" often means someone hopelessly unlike me who has no

imperfections. “Blessed” often means I think God gave me what I want. Happy can mean lots of things, some positive and some negative.

But Jesus invitation to us is to be joyful in his Kingdom, the Kingdom he came to inaugurate on behalf of his Father. The basis of this kingdom is understanding God’s relationship to us. That’s where Jesus always begins. The Father’s love grounds every moment of our lives, a love that comes always as a generous gift. Until we understand the God that Jesus presents—not the God that can’t wait to put us in hell but the God that can’t stop inviting us into his Kingdom—we do not understand the Gospel message.

This is why people who are poor, who cry, and who are not puffed up with pride can be blessed and happy. They have found that God is their wealth, their joy, and their strength. They don’t waste time trying to stuff their lives with things, with money, with pleasure as if these alone could begin to make them happy. They see all of life as precious moments filled with precious gifts that come from God’s infinite love. And because they cry, they can see the tears of others; because they are poor, they help others who are poor; and because they aren’t filled with themselves, they can be present to others.

This is such a liberating feeling! It liberates us to do the things that show the Kingdom to others—to work for justice and peace; to be an ambassador of mercy, and to do so even when the odds seem against us. The Kingdom is about what God does for me; but it is also about what we do for others because of God’s love in our life.

Think of the happiest people you know, people truly at peace and living with joy. What is their secret? They have come to an understanding of how God relates to them, and they bring this understanding into every opportunity in their lives. They just radiate goodness to others. That’s what we are all called to do. And that’s what a parish is supposed to do—as a community of saints, of blessed people, we radiate God’s goodness to others.

This week many of us will go to the polls. As important as our vote is—and we have an obligation before God to vote because it shows our care for our nation—we must put it into perspective. Our salvation cannot come from a government. It can only come from God who has already voted in our favor through the life of his Son, Jesus. May the Spirit of Jesus bless us, make us happy, and also make us saints.

### III

Last month the Tampa Bay Lightning returned home with the Stanley Cup. They were met with a boat parade and then a celebration at Raymond James Stadium. People did their best to keep social distancing, but it was difficult with so many present who wanted to celebrate our area’s new heroes: Steven Stamkos, Victor Hedman, Andrei Vasilevsky, Nikita Kucherov, Brayden Pointe and all the others.

Now I love sports. I like hockey and baseball, and especially pro football. However, I really do not think that hockey players or any athletes are heroes. What they do on the ice, or the field has little to do with whom they are. A hero is someone with the courage to be not just the best hockey player or football player, but the best person he or she can be. A person can be a good athlete, or politician, but not

be a very good person. Hero status belongs to those who are the best they can be in every aspect of their lives.

The saints are really heroes. They completed their lives united to God, truly being all that God created them to be. They live on now united to the Lord in heaven, praying for us here on earth, and guiding us to be the heroes that God calls us to be.

Let's glance at some of the heroes we find in the Bible. There are heroes in the first part of the Bible, the Old Testament. For example, Abraham and Samson and David and Deborah and Ruth were all heroes because they allowed God's plan to work through them. They had the courage to stand by God's plan and to bring that plan to completion.

The Old Testament prepares us to experience the greatest of all heroes, Jesus Christ. I bet you never consider that. Jesus Christ is a hero, the greatest of all heroes. He gave himself completely to the will of God the Father, even though this meant being crucified for that part of creation that could have chosen God but who rejected him, mankind. Jesus Christ has restored God's reign among his people. He is the ultimate hero. He transformed the world with the Love of God. The New Testament also presents Jesus' mother, Mary, as the greatest women who ever lived. She was open to God's will no matter how much she suffered because of it. We also learn about Joseph, the Lord's foster father, who sacrificed everything for this child and the child's mother.

Jesus calls us to be heroes. On the Mountain of the Beatitudes, today's Gospel, he calls us away from being self-centered to being God centered. He calls us to be poor in Spirit. Whether we are rich or poor or somewhere in between, the center of our lives must be God, not money. He tells us that we cannot close our eyes to the atrocities of the world. "Blessed are those who mourn." The Lord wept over Jerusalem because it refused to recognize the presence of God in its midst. We weep over our society that allows children to be exploited by drugs, sex and crass commercialism. We mourn over a society that allows a million and a half abortions a year. We mourn over a society that takes children away from their parents and holds them in cages. The meek who inherit the earth are those who are not going to allow hatred to dominate their lives. They will fight for what is right, but they will be merciful, they will be sincere, they will be peacemakers for the sake of the Lord. Finally the beatitudes speak about those who are willing to suffer the mockery of the world, those who would rather be in the minority who choose God than be in the majority of those who go along with the pagan materialism of society.

The saints, whom we honor today, give us an example of people emptying themselves to allow God's plan to work in them, people who have the courage to be genuine heroes. They are not plaster or plastic statues of unreal people in pietistic poses. They are real people from every walk of life who met the challenge of Christianity and conquered. They are priests and nuns, like Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Sienna, married people and single people, like Thomas More and Rose of

Lima, very old and very young, like Theresa of Avila and Theresa of Liseaux, They are the wealthy, like Thomas Beckett, the middle class, like Ignatius Loyola, and poor like Peter Claver. They were geniuses, like Thomas Aquinas, and people of simple intelligence but vast wisdom, like John Vianney. All of these and all whom I could not possibly name accepted the challenge of Christianity and had the courage to wash their baptismal robes in the Blood of the Lamb, as *Revelation* says. They had the courage to live the sacrifice of Christ in their lives. They had the courage to make the love of God real in the world.

The *Book of Revelations* also notes that there is a throng of people before the throne of the lamb, people from every race and nation, a number too numerous for anyone to count. These are those who have gone before us, who live now and who will live in the future who are willing to sacrifice everything for the Kingdom of God. These are the true heroes following the greatest of all heroes, Jesus Christ.

Am I among that number? Are you? Do we have the courage to proclaim God's love with our lives? Well, that is why we pray today on the Solemnity of All Saints. We pray for the courage to follow the Lord. We pray for the courage to put God first in our lives. May the Lord help us to stand for him and with him.

Today we pray for the courage to be genuine heroes.

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