

Homily for November 1, 2009

Who wants to be a saint? Who wants to be holy?

(Scriptures for today's liturgy)



*I am just a weary pilgrim
plodding through this world of sin,
getting ready for that city,
where the saints go marching in.
Oh, when the saints go marching in,
Oh, when the saints go marching in,
Oh, I want to be in that number
when the saints go marching in.*

"Oh, Lord I want to be in that number..."

I'm confident that everyone here wants to be "ready for that city"
when our time comes to go marching in,
but do we want to be saints - now?

If the people in your family thought of you as a saint,
if your classmates at school, or your colleagues at work
or the folks in your neighborhood thought of you as holy,
would you take that as a compliment -
or would something about that make you uneasy?

Perhaps that's because we misunderstand the words "saint" and "holy."
And actually, they mean the same thing:
both come from the same root words.

When the New Testament calls Christians the "holy ones" or "saints"
it's not a reference to personal effort towards holiness
but rather to the holiness that's ours in being baptized.
By virtue of our baptism we are counted, numbered, among the saints,
the holy ones, the sons and daughters of God.

So, we're already "in that number" of the saints who go marching in.

And of course, it's not quite that easy!

Any holiness that's ours is the gift of God's grace in our hearts and lives
but we are called to gratefully receive, to live by,
to pay attention to God's desire
to share in our lives and God's desire for us to share in his.

Some say our culture has rejected God
- and certainly many people have.

But for most of us it's less a matter of conscious rejection
and more that we forget God, neglect God,
perhaps sometimes we even ignore God.

At least most of us admit that we often fail to pay attention
to our relationship with God.

Prayer, spirituality, holiness, saintliness:
all of these are the work of paying attention to God in our lives,
insuring that we don't forget, neglect or ignore the Lord.

In any relationship,
when we fail to pay attention to the presence of the other
and to what we share,
the relationship begins to wither, even to die,
regardless of how faithful to us the other might be.

So it is with God and us.

God never fails to pay attention to us
but we often fail to pay attention to God
and begin to distance ourselves
from the one who never leaves our side.

On All Saints Day we remember those who have gone before us
who paid attention to God in their life in simple, ordinary ways.

They paid attention to God in prayer.
They paid attention to God in their relationships
with spouses, families, friends, neighbors and colleagues.
They paid attention to God by being honest and just at work.
They paid attention to God by caring for the poor.
They paid attention to God in their choices, decisions, finances,
habits, entertainment and politics.
They paid attention to God in their heart of hearts
where God alone knows the truth of who each of us is.

All Saints Day invites each of us to look at how we pay attention
to the presence of God in our lives.


The beatitudes in today's gospel each begin with,
"Blessed are those..."
Sometimes that's translated,
"Happy are those..."
But an even better translation would be,
"Truly honorable are those..."

Truly honorable are those who pay attention to God

in poverty of spirit, in grief and loss and in humility,
in the mercy they show others and in their purity of heart.

Truly honorable are those who pay attention to God
by making peace, standing firm for the truth
and seeking a right relationship with the Lord.

And *truly honorable, holy and saintly* are those who come this morning
to pay attention to God in prayer and song,
to pay attention to God who lives in all who are gathered with us,
to pay attention to God's truth proclaimed in the scriptures,
to pay attention to God's love revealed in the sacrifice of the Cross
and to pay attention to God, present to us in the Supper of his Son
whose attention to us is ever faithful to us
until he welcomes us to his table in heaven - with all the saints...

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