

## "AN APPEAL FOR SAINTS"

### INTRODUCTION

"For all the saints, who from their labors rest,  
Who Thee by faith before the world confessed Thy name,  
O Jesus, be forever blest. Alleluia. Alleluia."

The words of our processional hymn remind us that on Thursday, the 1st of November, the Christian Church celebrated All Saints' Day. For something like 1,145 years, Christian people have paused on that day to honor the memory of their dead and to remember loved ones who have gone on to the world beyond this.

A great many of us have been brought up in the non-liturgical branches of the Protestant Church that tend to make less of this celebration than do our friends in the Anglican communion or the Lutheran tradition.

Methodists and Baptists and Presbyterians may wonder who we have in mind when we speak of the "saints". Do we have in mind only those who have been officially elected or elevated to this position by the Roman Catholic Church, or are we thinking in broader terms.

For today's meditation, I have in mind those men and women whose lives have been touched in some real way by the life of Christ, men and women whose lives have been truly remarkable in terms of Christian stature, some well-known and some not quite so well known, but people whose lives have been touched significantly by the life of Jesus Christ.

Call them, if you will, the A students of the Faith.

### CAPACITY TO LOVE

If we were to study carefully the lives of these honor students of the Christian faith we would discover that all of them had one quality of mind and spirit in common with each other. All of them possessed the extraordinary capacity to love - to care, to be concerned about the lives of people around them.

The capacity to love. This one quality would shine through in their lives. When you come down to it, this capacity to love is simply the capacity to lose one's self in the life of another person. Isn't that about it. The capacity to love is the capacity to lose one's self in someone else.

Let's take it a step further. I think that all of us would acknowledge that it is far easier to lose some other things than it is to lose one's life completely in someone else's life. You can lose your money overnight. You can lose your health in the twinkling of an eye. You can lose a life partner or a child in the matter of seconds. You can lose your integrity or your virtue far easier than you think you can. You can lose your mind or your grasp on reality when you're least expecting to. All of this we know because in ways we have experienced it, but to lose yourself completely in the life of someone else is a different matter.

This is more difficult; it's always with you. You can never seem to get completely away from yourself.

It's not easy to shake ourselves loose from all of our secret ambitions and selfish desire, from all of those inner struggles that take place behind the closed doors of our lives, from those things which go to make the center of what we call our EGO.

HOW DOES ONE GO ABOUT DOING THIS? You ask: how does one go about doing this?  
I believe these "honor students" of the faith have something to say to us in this regard.

Their lives confirm this observation - and here we come to the heart of this meditation - that the only time people ever lose themselves completely is when they become completely absorbed by something or someone else. In their case, their lives were so completely absorbed by Christ - His teachings, His way of doing things, so completely absorbed by the power of His personality and the activity of His spirit in our world that they forgot themselves. They began to think about the lives of others.

And into their lives came this amazing capacity to really love, to care, to be concerned about others. Love for them was not just a noun, but a verb. It is something you do.

As they lost themselves in Him some things happened in their own lives. Their fears and anxieties disappeared. Things like pride, and vanity and emptiness was lost. And this, too. I'm sure they began to lose some of their critical nature, their little jealousies, their petty animosities, their impatience with others.

In losing themselves in Him, they found themselves.

As they lost themselves in Him, they came to find a wonderful freedom which enabled them to move at ease in the world - with grace and confidence - because they were no longer concerned with themselves and afraid of what might happen to them. Trust. Faith.

Several years ago a gentleman in our parish by the name of William Logan sent me a little card. Entitled, "Why Were the Saints, Saints?", he picked it up at St. Patrick's where his wife attended services. I'm fond of it's message and bring it to mind again today.

"Why were the saints, saints? Because they were cheerful when it was difficult to be cheerful, patient when it was difficult to be patient; and because they pushed on when they wanted to stand still, and kept silent when they wanted to talk, and were agreeable when they wanted to be disagreeable. That was all. It was quite simple and always will be!"

AN APPEAL As I see it, the world today is just crying out for more and more of these "giants" of the Christian life, pleading for people who have lost themselves in something greater than themselves, namely this love of God which we experience in the person of Jesus Christ - so that they can bring that renewing and healing touch into the poisoned areas of life where person is often pitted against person, race against race and nation against nation.

We honor those whose lives have been touched by Christ. They have gone from our midst, but their beauty and influence is still felt. They say to us:

"I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course. I have kept the faith..."