

1. November 2024

Solemnity of All Saints
The universal call to holiness

Rev 7:2-4,9-14

Then I saw another angel rising where the sun rises, carrying the seal of the living God; he called in a powerful voice to the four angels whose duty was to devastate land and sea, 'Wait before you do any damage on land or at sea or to the trees, until we have put the seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.' And I heard how many had been sealed: a hundred and forty-four thousand, out of all the tribes of Israel. After that I saw that there was a huge number, impossible for anyone to count, of people from every nation, race, tribe and language; they were standing in front of the throne and in front of the Lamb, dressed in white robes and holding palms in their hands. They shouted in a loud voice, 'Salvation to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' And all the angels who were standing in a circle round the throne, surrounding the elders and the four living creatures, prostrated themselves before the throne, and touched the ground with their foreheads, worshipping God with these words: Amen. Praise and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honour and power and strength to our God for ever and ever. Amen. One of the elders then spoke and asked me, 'Who are these people, dressed in white robes, and where have they come from?' I answered him, 'You can tell me, sir.' Then he said, 'These are the people who have been through the great trial; they have washed their robes white again in the blood of the Lamb.'

On this day, we commemorate all the saints: both those who led a life of hidden holiness and whose names we do not know, as well as those whom we know by name, because the Church keeps their memory, so that we can officially venerate them as saints.

It is important to emphasize again and again that, while we Catholics pay great veneration to the saints - in particular the Virgin Mary - we never worship them. Perhaps in some countries there are certain customs that do not make this difference very clear to someone outside the Church, but, at the end of the day, every Catholic knows that adoration belongs to God alone.

The veneration of the saints, including those whom we do not know, has a profound meaning. In the reading from Revelation that we hear today, reference is made to a multitude made up of those saints who remained faithful to the Lord in the great tribulation, who suffered much for the faith or even suffered martyrdom. They, coming from every nation, race, people and language, are wonderful witnesses of the Lord.

In the first instance, we venerate in them the glory of God, who has made Himself present in their lives and in their profession of faith. Glorious are You, O Lord, in the lives of Your saints (cf. "Mirabilis Deus in sanctis suis" - Offertory of All Saints). In the saints, God has found a great response to His love. He filled them with His presence and strengthened them so that, in following His Son, they focused their whole life on God. But at the same time that we praise the glory of God in the saints, we also venerate the person, who, in their freedom, gave this response to divine love and put nothing before it, even at the price of their own life.

It is this consonance between the grace of God and the appropriate response of the person that gives us a glimpse of the great light that emanates from the saints. And this light is not limited only to the martyrdom of blood; rather, it shines wherever a person responds to God's love and strives to correspond fully to His Will.

Therefore, with good reason the Church also commemorates all those saints whom we do not know; all those who were faithful to the Lord and served Him with total dedication and devotion, thus fulfilling their vocation. They are the light of the world, as Jesus said to His disciples (cf. Mt 5:14)!

If we wanted to express it in poetic language, we could say that the saints are the stars of a new heaven and a new earth; the oil lamps, shining before the Lord of heaven and earth... It is through them that the Lord will renew His Church, because the saints are the fire of love and in them God makes Himself particularly present and known.

We can ally ourselves with all the saints, because, in fact, all Christians are called to the way of holiness. We can wash away all our faults in the blood of the Lamb, and allow the light of the Holy Spirit to pierce the shadows that still hang over our lives.

This Solemnity of All Saints reminds us especially that the path to holiness is accessible to each person, each according to the specific vocation God has given him or her. Although it may go unnoticed by people that the saints live in their midst, the Lord knows them. Not only the martyrdom of laying down one's life for the sake of Christ shines forth in the midst of the darkness of this world, but also every act of love in hidden things, every denial of self for love of the Lord, every service to one's neighbor, every fulfillment of state duties in union with God, every fervent prayer and apostolic work...

The holiness to which God calls us is not as difficult to attain as many may fear. Since it consists in growing in the love of God, it is a path that becomes easier and easier. It is love that gives us wings, making us capable of accomplishing even the things that seem most difficult!

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you (...) For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mt 11:28,30).

The Lord will sustain us and in all situations will help us to grow in His love. In this way we will be able to live our vocation and lead a life of holiness; we will be able to be the light of the world, testifying to the infinite goodness of God. "Nothing is difficult when you love God!" -said the little venerable Anne de Guigné... And she is right!