

ALL SAINTS  
NOVEMBER 1, 2007

Today we celebrate

- *all saints*, all the saints, known and unknown
- the “great multitude,  
which no one can count,  
from every nation, race, people, and tongue,  
who stand before the throne and before the Lamb,  
wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands.  
who cry in a loud voice:  
‘Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne,  
and from the Lamb.’” (1<sup>st</sup> reading: Revelation 7:9-10)

The tradition of such celebration dates to the beginnings of the Christian community.

The early Christians celebrated the anniversaries of martyrs, i.e. *sure saints*.

Gradually, the community began adding to its list of anniversaries  
persons it discerned to be particularly holy.

Gregory III (731-741) consecrated a chapel in the Basilica of St. Peter to all the saints  
and fixed the anniversary for 1 November.

Gregory IV (827-844) extended the celebration to the entire Church.

In celebrating all the saints, we really and ultimately celebrate

- the Holy One whose goodness transfigures those who love Him
- the Holy One who, by His love, sanctified the “saints” *and sanctifies us*

Now, all this talk about sanctity, about holiness

may sound somewhat abstract; to me it sometimes does.

“Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord!”

What exactly is *holiness*?

What is it for God to be *holy*? What is it for *us* to be holy?

And what does holiness have to do with

- everyday life?
- eating, and commuting, and computing, and doing laundry or the lawn?

Thomas Aquinas, one of these multitude whom we celebrate,  
says “by ‘holy’ we signify the purity of divine goodness”.  
God *is* goodness. When we say God is holy, we say that He is pure goodness.  
For God to be holy is for God to be Himself, *purely good*.  
Aha, now, what is *goodness*?!  
It is difficult to define, for it is primary, it is not relative to anything.  
A “good” is a reality insofar as it attracts  
and fulfills (to varying degrees) when embraced.  
There are relative goods: e.g. candy and jewels.  
There are “absolute” goods  
beyond which we do not desire, which we desire for themselves: human persons.  
*The good* is God, who forever attracts and perfectly and definitively fulfills.

In celebrating all the saints, we celebrate this Good God

- who cannot but love
- to whose attraction these Brothers and Sisters, whom we celebrate, responded  
Indeed, “they have washed their robes  
and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb.” (Revelation 7:14)  
In other words, they allowed the excess and overflow of divine love  
(signified by the Blood of the Lamb)  
to take hold of and overflow in them.

To be a saint is

- to let divine love irrigate every fiber of who we are
- to be *totally* in love with God, with Christ, the God-man

In celebrating all the saints, we celebrate this Good God who is also attracting us.

God touches us and attracts us,

such that “we are God’s children *now*” (2<sup>nd</sup> reading: I John 3:2)

Deep inside, we are saints with the saints because we are loved.

And we are increasingly saints to the extent we allow Christ to take hold of us.

All this requires is a simple, faithfully repeated “yes”

expressed in and with faith, hope, and love.

This does not require some extraordinary feeling.

Holiness is therefore not something that we feel, but something that we believe.

Holiness in us is the result of being loved by the Holy One.

If so, then holiness has *everything* to do with everyday life.

We, gathered here, participate in God's own happiness.  
The saints in "heaven" do so in all that they are.  
We look forward to such plenitude of happiness,  
for "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (I John 3:2).

We are carried by all the saints.  
They communicate divine happiness to us, and lead us to the fullness of it.  
We will thank them from the bottom of our hearts  
when we see them face-to-face, and realize that we share in eternal glory  
because they said "yes" to helping us.