

November 1, 2017 Solemnity of All Saints

9:30 a.m. Nazareth Sisters; 12:10 Cathedral

I always feel like this great Solemnity of All Saints is just the main feature in the middle of a three-day celebration. It began with yesterday's observance of Halloween----"All hallowed e'en"----which of course at its origin was precisely that---All Saints Eve. Nowadays, Halloween is mostly associated with "Trick or Treat" and scary costumes. I enjoyed seeing all the children who came to my house last evening for "Trick or Treat" night. The kids were all dressed up in the normal costumes of the day: spider man, princesses, goblins; but I actually had one entire family come (a member of our diocesan Pastoral Staff), with all the children dressed up as different Saints. Of course I had to guess who each one was supposed to be.

But that "all hallowed eve" prepares us for today's Solemnity of All Saints, those whom we heard about in today's First Reading from the Book of Revelation. There were far more than the 144,000 who had been marked with the "*seal of the living God*"; there were a "*great multitude which no one could count, from every nation, race, people and tongue.*" And they were identified by one of the Elders as: *those who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes, and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb.*"

Just think about all the hundreds of people who have been canonized as Saints just during our lifetime, especially during the Pontificate of Pope John Paul, including Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Then, of course just recently Pope Francis canonized Pope St. John Paul and Pope John XXIII. People that we knew to be holy in our own lifetime are now canonized Saints! And of course we're very near to the great celebration of the Beatification of Father Solanus Casey, a humble Capuchin friar who lived and ministered among the poor in nearby Detroit.

But what makes today's Feast of All Saints so special, followed immediately by tomorrow's beautiful Feast of the Commemoration of all the Faithful Departed (All Souls), is that these are not the famous ones, or those formally declared to be canonized. Those among All Saints and All Souls are our family members who have gone before us in Faith----our relatives, friends, teachers, Sisters, brother priests and Bishops of our Diocese-----those who have "*survived the time of great*

distress and have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb.”

Those whom we celebrate and pray for during these three days were people just like you and me----people who lived their lives in this world, married/raised families, or perhaps lived their lives as priests, brothers or religious; but all of them, people who found themselves challenged by the conflict between the ways, values, and practices of the culture in which we live AND the ways of God, the values of the Kingdom of God, the teachings that Jesus gave so clearly in the entire Sermon on the Mount, and most especially in the powerful beginning part of that Sermon in the Beatitudes we just heard in today’s Gospel passage.

Just like those family members, friends and ancestors who now are, we pray among the Communion of the Saints----or on their way to join that Communion---we try to be “up to the challenge” of choosing God’s ways over the world’s ways---of choosing the Beatitudes and finding that service of others, compassion for the suffering, working for mercy and justice is the way to a blessed/happy life, as opposed to pursuing the world’s attitudes of power, possessions and prestige.

We live in a world that is so much in conflict; where people seem to no longer be able to have civil discourse; where people appear to be looking for things to disagree about, and so quickly resorting to violence. Yesterday’s terrorist attack in lower Manhattan is the latest example of the senselessness of taking innocent lives to prove some kind of superiority or power or political advantage.

There are those who think that they will overcome others by using hatred, violence, pressure, and intimidation. That force for evil has always been in the world (though it seems currently to be more pronounced), and it probably always will be.

But those we celebrate today----those among All the Saints----are those who chose the force for goodness, those who stood up to oppose those forces for evil by adhering to and promoting the ways of Jesus and the practice of the Beatitudes.

On Sunday, at Wings Stadium, nearly 3,000 people came together to fill that stadium----people who profess faith in Jesus and who choose to follow Jesus in their lives, even if they do so in various ways, under the banner of “Kalamazoo United”. People came together to proudly identify themselves as followers of Jesus, and to choose to live according to the Beatitudes rather than according to

the world's attitudes; people who choose to celebrate what unites us rather than what divides us.

There will always be forces for evil at work in the world. But what eventually will count us among the Communion of All the Saints is if we choose to stand up for what is right, good, true and of God no matter what the consequences might be.

Why do we do that? Because that is who we are, as we heard St. John tell us so clearly in today's Second Reading: *"See what love the Father has bestowed on us....(for) we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed....(But) when it is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."* That is our identity and our motivation. The Beatitudes provide for us the precise instructions to follow. And the Communion of Saints----our family members who have gone before us----are the ones cheering us on, interceding for us that we remain strong, faithful, and joyful in the ways we live our lives as the Church alive and well here on earth.

All we have to do is keep in mind the beautiful words of today's Psalm
Response: *Lord, let me always be part of the people who long to see Your Face!*
God bless you, now and always.