

Homily for Sunday, November 1, 2009 (Solemnity of All Saints)

All Saints Catholic Church, Milwaukee

*Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14; Psalm 24:1-6; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12*

I get a little uncomfortable when I go to church and some one—the priest or minister, choir director, etc.—addresses those gathered as “saints,” as in, “Good morning, saints!” It’s always struck me as a little presumptuous, even arrogant. It seems much easier to identify myself as a sinner than as a saint.

However, today’s celebration—when we honor the countless men and women of every age, including our own, who will never be canonized but whom we believe are among the holy ones in heaven—and a story I recently heard invited me to take another look at my attitude. It’s true that we’re all sinners; but today’s solemnity reminds us that we’ve been saved and called to live as saints!

A catechist who had served for over fifteen years in overseas was returning to her home country. One her First Communion students, a boy who had been inspired and helped by her ministry, decided to give her a gift. So he left early one morning on one of the trails leading out of the village. The trail took him through hills and valleys, open grasslands and dense jungles, and finally to a riverbed. He searched there for an hour for the most beautiful rock he could find. It was rough but filled with hundreds of mineral flecks that glinted like jewels in the sunlight.

After pausing for a drink at the river, the boy began his trip back to his village with the rock. He walked the same trail, through the dense jungles and grasslands, valleys and hills. It was near dusk when he returned to the village, where he found his teacher and presented her with the rock.

The catechist was quite moved by her student’s gift. After collecting her thoughts and emotions, she asked, “Where did you find such a beautiful rock?”

“Along the side of the river,” he answered matter-of-factly.

“The river?” she asked with amazement, “Why that’s 10 kilometers (over 6 miles) away! You didn’t have to go that far just to get me a gift.”

“But Miss,” the boy exclaimed, “The journey is part of the gift.”

That’s what the saints whom we celebrate today remind us. We celebrate all the holy men and women who have gone before us and especially those whose journeys we were privileged to witness. As we saw in John’s vision from the Book of Revelation it’s a large group, “from every nation, race, people and tongue.”

When John asked who this vast crowd was, one of the elders replied, “These are

the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb.”

John was likely writing during the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian (81-96 CE) when people were persecuted, tortured and killed for being Christians. Thankfully, few of us will likely be tested in that way; and relatively few of the saints whom we honor today were martyrs in the traditional sense. But that doesn't mean that they escaped times of tribulation; and nor can we. If we reflect for a moment, isn't life itself filled with times of tribulation and testing? Most of us don't need to go looking for trouble: at some time or another, it finds us!

Some trials are relatively routine or minor: waiting for that v-e-r-y s-l-o-w cashier at the store; helping a child navigate the transition from childhood into adolescence; trying to pay \$1000 in bills with \$500 in your checking account; struggling with a bout of the seasonal flu. There are major tribulations, too: things like disability, divorce, bankruptcy, foreclosure, war, and finally death itself.

So how can we join the company of the saints on our journeys of life? First, by (re)claiming our status as children of God and accepting the salvation that has already been offered to us, i.e., by washing our robes and make them clean in the blood of the Lamb, Jesus. Second, by adjusting our attitudes to those of the Beatitudes and being willing to be:

- *Poor in spirit*—to recognize our fundamental need for God.
- *Mourning*—to be able to lament not only the personal tragedies that befall us and our world but also the sins that are often the cause of those tragedies.
- *Meek*—to get over the conceit that we're “all that” and to embrace a humility that puts our relationships with God and others in proper balance.
- *Hunger and thirst for righteousness*—to make holiness and service to God and our brothers and sisters our greatest ambitions.
- *Merciful*—to be God's instruments of reconciliation.
- *Pure of heart*—to regularly examine our consciences and motives and to pray that our we conform more and more to God's will
- *Peacemakers*—to work for peace and for the justice that is its foundation.
- *Persecuted for the sake of righteousness and for living in the name of Christ*—to be willing to “walk the walk” of faith as well as “talk the talk.”

As the boy taught his catechist and the saints in every age teach us, it is that journey—walking our walk in, for and with Christ—that makes all the difference.+