

ALL SAINTS 2015

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When families come to the church to plan a funeral for a loved one, they sometimes have very peculiar requests. I heard about a man whose brother had just died, & he asked the pastor to tell everyone at the funeral that his brother was a saint. The pastor knew that these brothers were two of the most crooked and corrupt men in the community, so he told the man that he just could not lie and tell people that his brother was a saint....But the man wouldn't give up. He offered to donate 20 thousand dollars to the parish if the pastor would simply say those words...Now this put the priest in a very tough spot. He was a man of great integrity, but with that 20K dollars his church could reach out & help so many more people in need.... And so on the day of the funeral, the pastor stood over the man's casket and said, "This man was a rotten, no good sinner; but - compared to his brother - he was a saint." {For that kind of money we can always work out something.}

I tell this silly little story as we celebrate All Saints Day because I believe that every one of us - without exception - is called to be a saint. There isn't one of us here who is called to be anything less than a saint.... When we die, people should say about us, "This was a good man....This was a good woman....This was a saint."...Anyone here who doesn't want to be a saint?...Stand up....(*Oops! Why am I standing?*)

Now this poses an interesting question: how does one go about becoming a saint here in the twenty-first century?.... Is it to do what St. Anthony did in the fourth century - turn our backs on the pleasures of this world and live apart from society?.... Is it to do what St. Francis did in the thirteenth century - turn our backs on material wealth and go out and preach the Gospel to anyone who will listen?... Is it to do something like St. Elizabeth Seton did in the nineteenth century - raise a family and then spend the rest of our lives working with the sick and the needy?.... Or is to be like Mother Teresa and devote our lives to bringing the love and compassion of Jesus to the diseased and the dying in the slums of Calcutta?

The answer to these questions is NO, you don't become a saint by doing what God made somebody else to do.... You become a saint by doing what God made you to do. There's an old Jewish tale about a Rabbi named Zussa. He would tell his students that he wasn't worried that when he came face to face with God, that God would ask him "Why weren't you Abraham?" or "Why weren't you Moses?"... Zussa was worried that God would ask him, "Why weren't you Zussa?"... When my time comes to stand before the Lord, I don't expect Him to ask me why I

wasn't St. Anthony or St. Francis or Mother Teresa or why I wasn't Father Ed... But He might ask me why I wasn't Ron Tocci,...why I wasn't the best Ron Tocci I could be.

You see, God has given each of us our own way to become a saint... If you are a parent at this moment in your life, that's exactly the way God intends for you to become a saint - by being the best parent you can be... If you are a husband or a wife, that's how God intends for you to be a saint – by being the best spouse you can be.... If you are a student right now, that's exactly the way God wants for you to become a saint - by working hard to be the best student you can be. ...If you are a senior citizen at this moment in your life, you can become a saint by being the best senior citizen you can be....If you are an employer or a worker, then be the best employer or best worker you can be. Whatever your status at this time in your life, the way G. intends for you to become a saint is by being the best you that you can be.

If you're not sure how to go about being the best YOU that YOU can be – about how to be a saint in today's world - just go back & read today's Gospel passage again...where J. begins his Sermon on the Mount ...There in the Beatitudes, He lays out for us a vivid blueprint of how a Christian life should be lived....When we live trying to follow that blueprint, with clean hearts, merciful hearts,...striving always for righteousness ,...ever working for peace,...holding fast to our beliefs when we're insulted or attacked,Jesus promises that the day will come when we will be part of that great multitude St. John envisioned in our first reading:saints from “every nation, race, people and tongue,” standing before God's throne, robed in white. Isn't that a glorious image of heaven: people of every nation, every culture, every color united around God's throne ? If we could only be so united here on earth.

And Jesus wants you and me to someday be there with all of them, with all the saints who ever lived,...both the official Church saints, & all the departed saintly men, women, teenagers, and children we remember and honor today....He wants us there with them – with Him....& He will help us to get there. He will help us to follow the blueprint He's given us....We make the choice. Do I work with His help at being the best ME I can be, or do I give in to the world's temptations and pressures to be less than God made me to be?...There's an anonymous little poem that sums up the choice Jesus sets before us in his Sermon on the Mount:

*The high soul takes the high way; The low soul takes the low.
And in between on the misty flats, the rest drift to and fro.
But to everyone there opens a way - a high way and a low.
And everyone decides the way his soul shall go.*

In a few moments as we memorialize Christ's sacrifice on this altar, we will join our voices with all the heavenly saints to shout "Holy, Holy, Holy, Hosanna in the highest..." May all the saints around God's heavenly throne pray for you & me,... that we will choose the HIGH way, that we will try to be the best you and the best me that we can be,...so that at our funeral, no one will have to bribe the priest.... AMEN.