

# +FEAST OF ALL SAINTS

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey  
November 1, 2017

+In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Post haec vidi turbam magnam...After this I saw a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and tribes, and peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne, and in sight of the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands* (Apoc. 7:9).

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,  
My very dear sons,

We pilgrims along the way of faith cannot as yet see the end of the road. That great City contemplated by Saint John is still beyond the horizon, around the bend of our earthly existence. Our precious Catholic Christian faith gives us, it is true, a certain knowledge of that end, the only one for which God truly destines us, depending, of course, on our free acceptance; but we cannot yet see clearly this heavenly Jerusalem described in the Apocalypse, nor can we contemplate the throngs of saints that give glory therein to God and to the Lamb. Most fortunately we *do* have the prophets—especially Saint John, the prophet of Patmos—, who illumine for us the words of Our Lord in the Gospel and offer us a glimpse of these great realities to come, by means of a little ray of that beatitude which we hope with all our hearts and minds to obtain.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...Blessed are the clean of heart; for they shall see God.”<sup>1</sup> Truly we are beggars, mendicants of beatitude. This treasure of our participation in divine life is the thing that will make us happy. This alone will make us truly and completely blessed. Our other happinesses, our alternate beatitudes, are just stepping stones along the way. This is why Our Lord, when first He sat down upon the mount, on that hill near Capernaum where He inaugurated His public preaching according to Saint Matthew, chose as His very first word “blessed” (*makarioi*).

Even a cursory glance at the list of the “Beatitudes” proposed by Christ alerts us, however, that this beatitude is no common happiness, no mere consolation prize obtained without difficulty, but comes only after many tribulations. The poor in spirit, the meek, those who mourn on this earth, these alone are deemed blessed. It is to be feared that the great number of our contemporaries, Catholics as well as others, find themselves increasingly unable to accept the hardships of this program, because the materialism of our so-called “consumer society” has spoiled us badly. We are all at risk. The temptations that pour through our decadent Western culture are truly no laughing matter.

One particular temptation that can affect traditionally minded Catholics is to throw oneself into new forms of the old heresy of Jansenism, that is to say into a joyless, gray existence that, while shunning sin (which is good), utterly denies our humanity (which is bad). Why

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. 5:3, 8.

would we do that? Well, the atheistic humanism and rampant sinfulness that is sweeping the world away at present might prompt us, you see, to seek a solution in an over-reaction, in the denial of all cultural expressions of art, music, or literature, except, perhaps, for a select program of approved pious materials. There is nothing bad to be said about piety, but there exists a type of narrowness parading under the name of piety that is not Catholic (which is to say “universal”) but rather typical of many forms of Protestantism. In another, similar way, some traditional Catholics are much tempted by the delusion of the sedevacantist view of the Church, owing to the current confusion over disciplinary and moral issues. Both of these options, Jansenism and sedevacantism, are certainly the work of Satan and represent a falling away from the path of the Beatitudes.

On the contrary, the message of this feast day, the sense of the vision presented to us by Saint John in the first reading taken from the Apocalypse, is that there is exceeding joy in God despite it all, and that we must let that vision inform our soul as we make our way along the dangerous path of our earthly existence. Together with this joy, there remains a kind of desire. “Why should our praise and glorification, or even the celebration of this Solemnity, mean anything to the Saints?” once asked Saint Bernard in a homily for this day. “The Saints,” he said, “have no need of honor from us; neither does our devotion add the slightest thing to what is theirs.... But I tell you: when I think of them, I feel myself inflamed by a tremendous yearning.”<sup>2</sup> That yearning is what we need to speed us along. What we lack at present is neither more foolish contentment with our earthly gadgets and pleasures, nor some sort of bleak pessimism, but a yearning for something higher, something nobler.

We Benedictines of the great tradition of Solesmes place much importance on the holy liturgy, within which there is this joyous but serious yearning. Pope Emeritus Benedict is likewise one much enamored with the liturgy. In a homily for All Saints a few years ago he proposed these telling words:

The liturgy invites us to share in the heavenly jubilation of the Saints, to taste their joy. The Saints are not a small caste of chosen souls but an innumerable crowd to which the liturgy urges us to raise our eyes. This multitude not only includes the officially recognized Saints, but the baptized of every epoch and nation who sought to carry out the divine will faithfully and lovingly. We are unacquainted with the faces and even the names of many of them, but with the eyes of faith we see them shine in God's firmament like glorious stars.<sup>3</sup>

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Star of the Sea, Queen and Mother of all the Saints, be ever there to pick us up when we fall along the rugged path of the beatitudes. She now forever contemplates the vision and is filled with motherly love for all her children who stumble along with spiritual yearning toward the final threshold. Amen. Alleluia.

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<sup>2</sup> Disc. 2, *Opera Omnia Cisterc.* 5, 364ff.

<sup>3</sup> Vatican Basilica, Wednesday, 1 November 2006.