

+ 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,

What a marvelous thing it is, this epic story of the Saints! From age to age their saga fills the pages of the Church's martyrology and captures the imaginations of Christ's faithful, both young and old. The Apocalypse of Saint John shows us these holy men and women as they shine in the glory of Heaven; the lives of the Saints, on the other hand, present to the eyes of our soul the edifying and often dramatic narrative of their struggles and successes in living out the Gospel while still treading upon this solid earth.

Sometimes we are tempted to think that if only our own world of 21st century America had more Faith, we too could be Saints like those of other times; if only conditions were right we could show to the Church and the world the love of God that swells in our hearts. But, in fact, in strict reality, in all fairness, the adventure of sanctity *can* be lived in any situation and has already been lived under the most diverse skies around the world and amid the most varied social conditions. We *can* write a page of our own in the annals of the Saints, and we must do this.

Not infrequently the call to sanctity has been a call to bloody martyrdom. The Apostles won the palm of martyrdom, all of them, including Saint John—at least in a certain manner (though he miraculously survived), according to the ancient tradition recorded by the Church Father, Tertullian, in his work entitled *The Prescription of Heretics*. Tertullian tells us that John was plunged into boiling oil in Rome, but suffered nothing from it. He also relates that all in the audience of Colosseum were converted to Christianity upon witnessing this miracle. We are also familiar with the famous martyrs of the early Church such as Saint Cecilia or Saints Cosmas and Damian, for example, whose names have found their glorious place in the canon of the Roman rite of Holy Mass. Many holy virgins—some of them martyrs as well—graced that same age of Faith of the Early Church.

When the time of the first martyrs came to a close, souls yearning to suffer something for Christ invented a new type of witness, that of monastic life. The Desert Fathers and not a few very holy women gave to the world the spectacle of lives hidden away from the buying and selling of secular life, but beautiful in God's sight for their perpetual chastity, poverty, obedience, prayer and mortification. It started with a few courageous individuals such as Saint Antony of Egypt and ended with thousands of monks and nuns filling monasteries all over Palestine, Egypt, Syria and many other places, before spilling over into the choice cultural soil of

Europe, where Saint Benedict began the immense family of black monks, representing a whole new chapter of this monastic way of life.

Saint Martin, who started out as a monk, was the first non-martyr (or one of the first) to be publicly venerated as a Saint, and the Church was blessed with numerous other confessors of the Faith, many of them, like Martin, were holy bishops or even popes. The Middle Ages saw an incredible flourishing of monastic orders, both masculine and feminine. The great abbey of Cluny had something like a thousand other monasteries under its rule. In his time, a little later, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux was probably the most famous man in Western Christendom. The Mendicant Orders of Saint Francis and of Saint Dominic added a new dimension to religious life, as consecrated souls emerged from their cloisters to evangelize cities and villages and to teach in the great universities that were being founded at that time. In the troubled epoch of the Protestant Reformation and of the great effervescence of ideas we call the Renaissance, God sent Saint Ignatius and his tireless missionaries throughout Europe and to the ends of the earth, while Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint John of the Cross continued to make contemplative life bring forth its precious fruit within the monastery walls.

In more modern times the Church has canonized a vast array of holy founders and foundresses of religious orders, often dedicated to the care of the sick and the poor. And the variety and spiritual beauty of the Saints of every order continues to amaze and charm our souls. We need but to think of the Holy Cure of Ars, of Padre Pio, or of Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta. These ardent messengers of the Gospel are all like so many flowers sprung up in the Garden of the Lord of Heaven and Earth for the glory of the Father and the joy of the Church—and even the world.

Where are the saints today? Well, they are hidden for the most part, as is fitting. While the artificial lights of the ever more powerful modern media continue to shine upon “beautiful people” who are here today gone tomorrow, the saints are busy doing good that will last, working from within the relative obscurity of a poor life according to the Beatitudes, persevering until the day comes for God to put them on the lamp stand for the whole Church to see and venerate. Perhaps your next-door-neighbor is one of them. It would be quite an understatement to say that we have need of saints and of great saints at this moment in the life of the Church, but Our Lord has no doubt thought of this already and set in motion the great plan of the Holy Spirit for the salvation of this lost generation (like so many other lost generations in the past).

May Our Lady, the Queen of all the saints, together with the vast army of holy souls that she protects under her Immaculate mantle, pray and intercede for us. It is said that Saint Bernadette of Lourdes, as she drew near to the moment of her death, uttered these last words in response to the first part of the Hail Mary recited by a Sister that was with her, “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for me, poor sinner, poor sinner, poor sinner...” Such is the voice and sound of sanctity. Amen. Alleluia.