

+ FEAST OF ALL SAINTS

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey
November 1, 2019

+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,

Where are the Saints?

The holy liturgy on this first day of November, feast of All Saints, likes to place before the eyes of our soul the vision of Saint John, in the Book of Revelation or the Apocalypse, where the Saints, the Blessed, from each of the tribes of Israel are numbered: twelve thousand. Next to these Saints taken from the chosen people of Israel, Saint John speaks of a numberless crowd of blessed souls coming from all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues, which figures among the elect, who are in the presence of the One who sits on the throne and of the Lamb. So, it seems we must say that the Saints are in Heaven. They are the permanent residents, the very citizens of the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Then again, this is not entirely correct. Saving the case of Our Lord and His Blessed Mother, who are already in Heaven with their own bodies, now immortal, as for the rest of the Saints, it is only after the general Resurrection and the Last Judgment that they will live in their glorified bodies, in the heavenly city. Until then the mortal remains of these holy persons remain on earth. In this sense the Saints sleep in the earth until the last day. The founder of our family of Benedictine monks, Dom Prosper Gueranger, in his wonderful little book on the life of Saint Cecilia, tells of the underground city of the martyrs and other Christians in Rome, the catacombs with their many streets going for miles, where the dead were buried and the confessors of the Faith, including popes, would hide from the Roman officials. Along the Via Appia, for instance, or on the spot known as the Vatican, these silent and dark cities were the residence of many Saints and still are today. A great number of Saints repose as well in the famous Christian churches of Rome, built after the end of the Roman persecutions. It was Pope Boniface VIII who converted the Pantheon into a church where a great number of the bodies of martyrs were given a home. Often the Saints sleep under the main altar, like Saint Catherine of Siena in the church of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, or in splendid tombs carved by famous artists, as is the case of Blessed Fra Angelico. Of course, the most famous of these sleeping Saints are Saints Peter and Paul, each in the incomparable edifice covering his tomb. And Rome is by no means the only city of the Saints, whose relics are found all over the world, but especially in the great centers like Constantinople and even the earthly Jerusalem. Countless are the monuments, crypts, and simple graveyards, where these heroes of the faith rest in relative peace, though some, like Saint Joan of Arc, were never to know a peaceful burial, because of the fury of their

enemies, who hurled her ashes into the Seine river. We even have here at Clear Creek our own Roman martyr, Saint Bonosa, who will rest under the main altar of our crypt. So we must say that, in a way, the Saints are still with us, on this poor earth, at least as concerns their precious remains. This is all part of our meditation for tomorrow's commemoration of the faithful departed, among whom are many Saints.

But now there is yet another category of Saints with which we must deal. Even now, no doubt, no small number of Saints are still living and breathing in this world, still abiding in their human bodies, just as we all do. These are the Saints still accomplishing the great pilgrimage that takes them from the City of Man toward the City of God, by means of the rugged road of the Beatitudes. Such is subject of today's Gospel:

Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek; for they shall possess the land. Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.¹

We do not yet know who among these pilgrims will reach the dignity of canonization, either first here on earth, as is the case of the recently canonized Saint John Henry Newman, or in only Heaven, being inscribed in the complete list, the Book of Life.² We may even hope to be among them, by the grace of God, though we need not take any care about receiving praise from our fellow human beings, but only about doing the will of God. However that may be, there are, most certainly, Saints among us, still on earth.

So, in fact, the Saints are in Heaven and in many places upon the earth and under the earth. Where are we? Well, one might truly say that we are in trouble. Our earth, perhaps more than ever before, at least in Christian times, is a place of temptations, of delusions, of deceptions, and of evil of every kind. It has become a place of spiritual close-combat. "The life of man upon earth," explains the Book of Job, "is a warfare, and his days are like the days of a hireling."³ Fortunately the evil is not without remedy: there are still many fair things. Creation is good. Human nature in itself is good. And we have the Faith and the Sacraments of the Faith. We have the Blessed Virgin Mary. If only, in imitation of the Saints that have gone before us, we can avoid the snares of the evil one who prowls about, seeking to bring us to ruin; if only we can make good use of the beauty we still see around us and the example of the Saints, in order to make our way along the road to perfection, the road to God's Kingdom.

Where are the Saints? In fact they are already here in a real sense and they are coming... They are coming with Christ the King, with the one who says of Himself in the last pages of the Apocalypse, not I *will* come but I come, "Surely, I come quickly," Etiam venio cito.⁴ Come, Lord Jesus, Amen. Alleluia.

¹ Matthew 5:3-5.

² Cf. Apocalypse 20:15, for example.

³ Job 7:1.

⁴ Rev. 22: 20.