

FEAST OF ALL SAINTS

November 1, 2024

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey
+In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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 the sight of the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and they cried with a loud voice saying: Salvation to our God, who sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb. (Apoc. 7)

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

Today we celebrate All Saints' Day, the feast, not of just one Saint, but of the entire heavenly court. Saint John, in his Apocalypse, sees them as a "great multitude which no man could number" (7:9). In every age God has raised up these heroes of the Faith, both to do battle with the powers of darkness that deceive the great number of men and, more positively, to bear witness to the justice and mercy of God.

The word "saint" comes from the Latin, meaning "holy." The saint is the man or woman—or even child—who has become a living sanctuary of God's holiness upon earth. Sanctity and holiness are really the same thing. The saint is sanctified and holy, a model of holiness for all.

Originally the idea of sanctity or holiness, as understood in the Old Testament, was that a person, animal, or thing was *separated*, put apart, as belonging to God. Thus the holy of holies in the temple of Jerusalem was strictly destined for a special rite of worship prescribed by Moses. Nothing else was to take place in this sacred space thus separated from common use. What is holy in this sense is kept apart from all that is corrupt, soiled, profaned, or even everyday uses. It is something reserved for God. Most of all, under the Ancient Law, the people of God itself was kept apart from all other peoples.

Under the grace of the New Testament Christians took up this same notion of holiness or sanctity, but radically transformed through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the New Law. The coming of Christ, God-made-man, modified forever the notion of sanctity. Because we have the sacraments and especially the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist, we enjoy a proximity to God only dreamed of in the time before the coming of the Messiah. Christians are the new people of God in a sublime and definitive sense. They too are separated from the world, although in a new way.

Now, given all the gifts God has bestowed upon humanity, we should be living in a world of universal sanctity, especially since in our day the proclamation of the Gospel has reached the very ends of the earth. Holiness and religious perfection should be flowering in every part of the globe. But what is the actual situation? What do we really see?

What meets our gaze as we look out on the world of our day is more than a bit frightening. Society, at least in its higher echelons, seems to have reached a level of moral degradation never before witnessed, especially in Christian—or formerly Christian—countries. Violence knows no limits. Disrespect for authority, both religious and civil, is rampant. As for the family, the greatest possible confusion now rules over minds, as became evident in certain interventions at the recent Synod in Rome, where subtle by real attacks on the Christian understanding of the family were heard. Even those who seem to be our more honest politicians—senators, governors and such—are caving in to the growing power of evil lobbies.

Public sanctity and holiness have nearly disappeared. Sacrilege has been allowed and protected in some public places. New laws tend to force Christians and all men of good faith to violate their consciences: the upcoming election could be crucial from this perspective. Even common sense seems to have gone out the window. What is happening? Is the Antichrist soon to come? Or is he already here?

It is an inescapable fact, indeed, that we find ourselves on the threshold of difficult times, if not already a good bit beyond the threshold. There would be much to worry about. But we need not fear beyond measure. There is, in the eyes of Faith, a real beauty in living during the latter ages of the world. Saint Louis de Montfort spoke of the

true apostles of the latter times..., true disciples of Jesus Christ, walking in the footsteps of His poverty, humility, contempt of the world, charity; teaching the narrow way of God in pure truth, according to the holy Gospel, and not according to the maxims of the world; troubling themselves about nothing; not accepting persons; sparing, fearing and listening to no mortal, however influential he may be. They shall have in their mouths the two-edged sword of the Word of God. They shall carry on their shoulders the bloody standard of the Cross, the Crucifix in their right hand and the Rosary in their left, the sacred Names of Jesus and Mary in their hearts, and the modesty and mortification of Jesus Christ in their own behavior. (*True Devotion*, numbers 58-59)

St. Therese of Lisieux insisted that she would have liked to live to see those latter times, times of great peril, in order to bear greater witness to the One she loved:

When thinking of the torments which will be the lot of Christians at the time of the Anti-Christ, I feel my heart leap with joy, and I would that these torments be reserved for me. (*Autobiography*, Man. "B," 3r)

So, where do we stand? Well, in fact, as practicing Roman Catholics, we stand in very good stead. Thanks to the perfectly coherent and luminous teaching of the Church, readily available for all who care to receive it, we know exactly what to think about events and ideas that bombard us. Although we are still in the twilight of Faith, not having the direct vision of God, as do the Saints we are celebrating, we know enough, and we see clearly enough to make our way forward in safety, as long as we do not let our gaze be captured by the many-faceted mirror of the Anti-Christ, that alluring magic of false appearances so easily conveyed by the modern media.

This is not to say that a Catholic has to live constantly in the catacombs, or that every form of entertainment is evil—that there are no cultural expressions that merit our admiration. We must beware, however, of the perennial tendency to make excuses for the world and its implicit or explicit approval of sinful behavior. We must not call darkness light or light darkness. Error has no rights. In the end, God is all that matters—God and His Kingdom, of which Our Lady is the Queen. Let us be Saints.

Pope Benedict XVI, when he still was Cardinal Ratzinger, said in a homily:

Origen handed down to us a word of the Lord: "Whoever is close to me, is close to fire." He who refuses to be burnt will stand back in fear before Him. The "yes" of Christ's followers implies the courage to allow ourselves to be burnt by the fire of His Passion, which at the same time is the salvific fire of the Holy Ghost. It is only if we have courage enough to remain near this fire, if we let ourselves be set ablaze, that we shall also be able to set afire the Earth with the fire of life, hope and love. (Fourth Centennial of the Bamberg Seminary, 1986)

Thou hast redeemed us, O Lord, with Thy Blood, and of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made us for our God a kingdom. Amen. Alleluia.

