

Homily. Solemnity of All Saints. 31/10-1/11/2020.

Decades ago when I was a young student at the Seminary at Banyo I woke up to a habit that St. Paul had of referring to the Church, that is to the people who had come to faith in Jesus Christ, as 'the saints'. What Paul was doing by calling believers the 'saints' was affirming that they had by God's grace in Christ become God's children. This meant that they were now sisters and brothers of the Lord, and therefore sisters and brothers of each other in God's family, the new Israel and people of God.

St. Paul knew as well as anyone can that the sainthood of the believers, their inner holiness and Christ-like living, was a gift from and a work of God. It wasn't something they'd achieved for themselves by their own efforts, nor is it for any of us today. Rather, God had chosen and called them to faith, light and truth by loving them and they had co-operated and responded to this gift of God's merciful and loving grace.

The reading from the 1st Letter of St. John which we've listened to puts this message to us very plainly. It's God the Father's lavish love for us that we have to begin with and always keep thinking upon, because it's this Divine love-gift that has made us into God's children and members of God's new family. This loving grace is communicated and given to us in Jesus Christ, God's beloved Son by His Spirit living and working within us. Our job is to try to live up to and live out the meaning of this reality, becoming more like the Son until eventually we see Him as He really is. The Saints we honour and celebrate this weekend, all of them from the greatest and best known to the least and most obscure, grasped this message and let God's loving gift into their hearts and souls. Then, each

according to his or her own gifts and situation, set about living, sharing, witnessing to, practicing and passing on to others the love and mercy of God that they had received. This is what we call holiness; the love, kindness, even the presence of God shining out to other people through the frailty of our own human lives. In honouring all of the saints we're giving honour and praise to God, for holiness of living is all God's work within us, for us and through us for the life and salvation of the world.

The Beatitudes that we listened to in St. Matthew's gospel lay out for us the values of God, and therefore the values of God's family, our values. All of them are focused on service to others and the renewal of humanity. They challenge, and sometimes they even run counter to the values of our world and society. They speak highly of the poor, the sorrowful, the persecuted and those who work tirelessly for justice and for what is right. They praise the peacemakers, the merciful, the gentle and the pure of heart for the kindness and for grace they bring into our lives. They assure us that when we are attacked and persecuted for our faith and for living the Christian way, our reward will be great in heaven.

The Beatitudes tell us that all that we have and are is a gift from our God, loving gifts to be shared as we are becoming ever clearer images of the Son, our older and much wiser brother on the journey of faith through life. Finally, the Beatitudes guarantee us that holy living is possible for us, leading us to happiness with God and each other in the here and now and bliss at the last in Kingdom of heaven. In these causes and towards these ends all of the saints surround, inspire us and are praying for us today. For this and for all of God's work in us we give God our thanks and,

united with the saints, celebrate the Lord's Supper until we can join them in the great feast of God's family that never ends.