

## All Saints Day 11-1-15 Lindsay

One of the joys of celebrating Mass daily is being able to learn about the great saints on the church's calendar. Two or three days each week (or more) are feast days of some saint or another. Most of these saints are quite ancient, but some are quite recent like St John Paul the Second and St John the Twenty-third. But each of these saints gives us an opportunity to learn about the Church's history, her teachings and various forms of Catholic spirituality. If you pay attention you will notice that the saints represent a cross-section of humanity; in temperament, spirituality, intelligence, perseverance, wealth, social standing and so forth. Even if you cannot come to daily Mass, you can look and see if there is a saint's feast day. Note whose feast day it is and try to learn a little about that saint and the times they lived in. I'm not saying do a research project on each of them. But take a minute to look at their biography online. I was struck earlier this month at the juxtaposition of the feast days of St Jerome and St Therese of Lisieux. St Jerome's feast day is September 30 and St Therese's is the next day, October 1st. Both are doctors of the Church, but that's where the resemblance ends. St Jerome lived to a great old age, St Therese died at age twenty-four. St Jerome was argumentative and aggressive. The total opposite for St Therese who was anything but. One lived 1600 years ago, one died in 1897, well

within the lifetime of many people remembered by some of us here today.

Yet, they were both great saints.

If we are not careful and clear in our thinking, remembering the saints can be a source of despair rather than hope. We think of the saints as these highly exalted people way above us in holiness and ability. They are so much above us it seems a waste of time to try and reach for saintliness ourselves as something unattainable. I would like to remind you that most of the saints went through the same mode of thought themselves. I hear people in the confessional tell me, 'Father, I try to be good but I lose my temper sometimes'. So did St Jerome and St Paul. And St Peter as far as that goes. Most any fault you can accuse yourself of in the confessional, be sure that a multitude of saints struggled with that very same fault. Pride, lust, greed, laziness, obtuseness, sins of omission: all these things the saints wrestled with the same way we wrestle with them. So today, the Church honors all God's saints, most of whom we can recognize as more like us in our weaknesses and failings, but gloriously triumphant nonetheless. We gain hope when we confess that these human beings, who were much like ourselves, by clinging to God, and cooperating with his grace, have triumphed over their weakness and sin to become glorious members of that great body of saints who prostrate themselves before God, and cry out eternally,

*“Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving, honor, power, and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”*

The saints are our friends, as much as people still alive are our friends. They, of course are much closer to God than we are in this fallen world. If it is our life's goal to spend Eternity with God, how can we fail to address those who are with God already? By baptism, you and I are already members of the Communion of Saints, and the heavenly saints firmly wish to help us, to join with us in every act of prayer or worship, every act of charity, if we but make the effort. They certainly pray for us constantly; but do we often pray to them? How can we honestly think that Heaven is our driving goal, if we unthinkingly ignore the company of Heaven while here on earth?

When I was growing up in the Methodist Church we recited the Apostle's Creed every Sunday. In that creed is a formulation of belief in the 'communion of saints'. Yet, I don't remember ever learning anything about the 'communion of saints'. It was like it was rather embarrassing, a little too 'Catholic'. What does it mean? So, it was something that was put up on the shelf, out of the way. It was professed, but not in any way that had much meaning.

But the 'communion of saints' is something that belongs in every Catholic's spiritual toolbox. Every day in this Church we pray for someone that

has gone before us. This is belief in the communion of saints in a very real way. It promotes a healthy spirituality and attitude towards death. That we leave this earth at some point is an important fact that only a fool ignores. Praying and remembering those that have gone before us allows us to see this reality in a way that isn't despairing or morbid, but full of hope and love.