

# Feast of All Saints

## Introduction

It is a great joy to be with you, dear sisters, on this, the second anniversary of that day when, at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary you made public vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and celebrated the decree establishing the All Saints Sisters as an institute in full communion with the Holy See. Cardinal O'Brien rejoiced on that day two years ago and spoke glowingly of the richness of your Anglican Tradition, your history of prayer, hospitality, and service to those in need. His Eminence spoke with great affection of the many ways the All Saints sisters would strengthen and enrich the Archdiocese of Baltimore – and it falls to me to celebrate how his fondest hopes and prayers have come to pass.

And what a joy to share with you this great solemnity of All Saints which reminds us so powerfully of the goal of our Christian lives, for as St. Theresa of Avila said, "If I am not becoming a saint, then I am doing nothing". Furthermore, this is a feast in which we can celebrate with special meaning your consecration as religious through the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience.

## The Meaning of the Feast

I have often thought of this as 'the feast of no excuses'. We may all rightfully say that we are not a Francis of Assisi, an Edmond Campion, or a Joan of Arc, a Maximillian Kolbe or a John Henry Newman – but all of us have been called to become saints.

The writer, Evelyn Waugh, once described who a saint is: "Saints," he said, "are simple souls in heaven. Some people have been so sensationally holy in life that we know they go straight to heaven, and so put them on the liturgical calendar. And each individual has his own peculiar form of sanctity which he must achieve or cherish. (He added:) It's no good saying, 'I wish I were like Joan of Arc or John of the Cross.' I can only be Saint Evelyn Waugh (insert your own name here) after God knows what experiences in purgatory."

The point here is really drawn from our reading from the Book of Revelation. If we were this minute to join that happy throng of adorers in spirit and truth, we would

find in their number people very like ourselves. We'd find people that liked what we liked, disliked what we disliked, people from similar backgrounds, with similar strengths and limitations. To be sure, every one of them would be unique and precious in God's eyes. Yet there would be enough similarity – enough ordinariness – to remove from our hearts the illusion that the call to holiness was meant for someone other than ourselves.

### **The Communion of Saints**

And how we long for the communion of saints. We profess our belief that communion each time we profess the Creed. What does it mean? St. Bernard helps us out in today's reading in the Office of Readings. He asks what benefits the saints in heaven receive from our remembering them on this feast day. The answer is that the saints in heaven receive no benefit from us. But we benefit by our association with them through our faith, through listening to the Word of God, and through Christ's Eucharistic love in which heaven touches earth. They are calling to us, urging us onward, wanting nothing more than that we would join their company. They are seeking right now that we respond to the many graces in our lives that would strengthen our ties, our bonds of communion with them by enlarging our capacity to see as Christ sees and to love as Christ loves.

Deep down, we long to join that blessed communion. Even on our most joyful day, even in our most happy of experiences, there is that desire for something more – and that persistent “something more” is the vision of God not shared in solitary splendor but with the community of the redeemed, a community without division, rancor, selfishness, or grudges – as Pope Benedict XVI may have said, “a community without walls”. How we seek this state of blessedness in this vale of tears, marked as it is by the division of sin and hatred – to which, sadly, all of us, myself included, have made our contributions.

### **Joining That Blessed Communion**

Our longing must not remain a weak and idle wish, a velleity, or be thought to be an unattainable desire, a utopian dream. No, sanctity is real, it is attainable, the means are at our disposal, even as the joys of heaven are beyond all imagining. St. John makes this point in our second reading when he says, “Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it

is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

By water and the Holy Spirit we are God’s adopted children. We have in us already the Paschal Mystery of Christ as a new principle of life. The seeds of holiness have been planted in us and we pray that in God’s good time they have begun to germinate. Yet there is work to be done. St. John adds: “Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure, as he is pure.”

It is the Gospel that lays out most clearly the goal of sanctity for us all. In that Gospel Jesus preaches afresh the Beatitudes – one might say, the keys to ultimate happiness as individuals and as a community of faith. When Jesus speaks of the blessed as poor in spirit, grieving over sin, meek and humble, hungering for righteousness, merciful, clean of heart, desirous of peace, ready to be persecuted for the sake of the Kingdom – Pope Benedict tells us that he is really drawing a portrait of himself. For Christ was all of these in a degree we only image – Christ the Son of God and the Son of Mary.

These qualities should frame and shape our lives such, that the Father can see in us what he sees and loves in Christ, such, that our capacity to love as Christ loved expands so much that we are fit for the Kingdom of Heaven. Sanctity to be sure is not earned but received as a gift. It’s the gift of becoming that person God called us to be from all eternity.

And this brings us back full circle to the vows of your consecration. The evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience are like the Beatitudes in concentrated form – lived in community – and manifest to the entire Christian community – a form of life that urges us all onward to that Kingdom where Christ is with his saints, all in all.

It is my prayer that Christ through His Holy Spirit will continue to bless you, the members of this community in your vocation and give us all the grace to become one day pure of heart, poor in spirit, and united at one with the saving will of Christ, who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.