

All Saints - A
Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14;
I John 3:1-3;
Matthew 5:1-12a
Little Flower - 11/1/20

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of All Saints. Today we remember and celebrate all those who have gone before us in faith and who now live with God, including those whose faith is known to God alone.

"After this I had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands." In the Apostles' Creed, we profess our faith in the "communion of saints."

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "The communion of saints is the Church." However, in Catholic tradition, the Church includes not only the Church on earth, but also those in purgatory and the saints in heaven. The catechism also refers to the "Communion of the Church of Heaven and Earth." As we celebrate the Solemnity of All Saints, I want to reflect briefly on this communion.

When we are young, I do not think the communion of saints means that much to us. I only started thinking about it shortly after my father's death on November 25, 1972. He died while I was a student in Rome. I was able to return for his funeral and was able to remain at home until after Christmas. During that time, the boyfriend of a high school student from Little Flower was killed in an automobile accident on I-465. Although it was my father's death that first caused me to start thinking about the communion of saints, it was the boy's death that caused me to put my thoughts into words so that I could write her a letter of condolence. I still share these same thoughts at almost every funeral I celebrate. As I have gotten older and as more family members and friends have died, I have thought a lot more about this.

There is an unbreakable bond between the communion of saints in heaven and the Church on earth. This bond is the bond of love. When people die, their love does not die with them. Rather, their love for us is made eternal and made perfect. Therefore, our relationships do not end with death; rather they are deepened even if we are not fully conscious of their deepening. Likewise, if the bond between the communion of saints in heaven and the church on earth is real, I would suggest that our loved ones remain really present to us. After the death of a loved one, people often say that they wish they could talk to their mothers or fathers or husbands or wives or children. I have no doubt that our deceased loved ones hear every word we say to them. Unfortunately, as time passes, we often become less conscious of their presence. Therefore, I would suggest that one of the reasons we celebrate All Saints is to consciously remember our loved ones so that we will never stop seeing and celebrating their presence among us.

Like the canonized or recognized saints of the Church, our loved ones now in heaven intercede for us and also are role models for us. We ask them to intercede for us with God and to join their prayers to ours. Likewise, although they were not perfect, their best qualities can and should inspire our lives.

My brothers and sisters, no one understood the communion of saints better than St. Therese. After all, she was a mystic. Several years ago, I read Bishop Patrick Ahern's *Maurice & Thérèse: The Story of a Love*. From the beginning of her correspondence with the seminarian Maurice, St. Therese knew she was dying. Bishop Ahern wrote, "She did not feel she was taking liberties when she placed [Jesus'] words in her own mouth: 'It is best for you that I go. You are in sorrow now, but I will come back to you and your hearts will rejoice, and your joy no one will take away from you.'"¹ St. Therese had the best grasp of the bond between the communion of saints in heaven and the Church on earth. We can be confident that our loved ones in heaven remain as close to us today as St. Therese was close to Maurice after her death.

¹Patrick V. Ahern, *Maurice & Thérèse: The Story of a Love*, (New York: Doubleday 1998), p. 157. St. Therese puts into her own mouth the words of Jesus in John 16:7 & 22.