

Solemnity of All Saints

Nov. 1, 2013 (12:00 Noon; 5:15 p.m.)

Readings: Rev. 7: 2-4, 9-14; 1 John 3:1-3; Matt. 5:1-12

A famous homily of St Bernard for All Saints' Day is remarkably frank in its assessment, admitting that “the Saints have no need of honor from us; neither does our devotion add the slightest thing to what is theirs.... But I tell you, when I think of them, I feel myself inflamed by a tremendous yearning.”¹ While his remarks may have cast a slight pall on the celebration of the Feast of All Saints, it is certainly true—our praise really contributes nothing to those who are in God’s presence. They really do not need us. We need them!

But precisely because they are saints, they desire nothing more than to usher us in to their company. They are not trying to close the door immediately after they enter, hoarding for themselves the goodness of God. Being a saint does not mean that we are extraordinary or much less does it mean that we are perfect. But we must be willing to faithfully carry out our ordinary duties to an extraordinary degree of fidelity, just as people have done for centuries, with little fanfare.

When you think of heaven, what images come to mind? Do you think of a wide-open space, filled with “a great multitude, which no one could count?” Do you picture it filled with perfect people, or do you see it as inhabited by people willing to be perfected in that slow ad steady process of sanctification?

In his encyclical on Christian Hope, *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI made a frank observation about the reality both of sin and sanctity: “There can be people who have totally destroyed their desire for truth and readiness to love, people for whom everything has become

¹ St. Bernard of Clairvaux, (*Disc. 2, Opera Omnia Cisterc. 5, 364ff.*).

a lie,” and “On the other hand there can be people who are utterly pure, completely permeated by God.” He went on to write that for the “great majority” of people:

“there remains in the depths of their being an ultimate interior openness to truth, to love, to God. In the concrete choices of life, however, it is covered over by ever new compromises with evil—much filth covers purity, but the thirst for purity remains and it still constantly re-emerges from all that is base and remains present in the soul.”²

Very few people in the world have ever heard of Rolando Rivi. Lost amidst the excitement of the upcoming canonizations of Popes John XXIII and John Paul II was the moving story of the beatification of Bl. Rolando Rivi, a seminarian martyred during the communist insurgency in northern Italy during World War II. Clergy had raised their voices in the name of God to condemn massacres that immediately followed the war, and so the communists closed the seminary. But the 14 year-old refused to stop wearing the cassock after returning home saying, “It is the sign that I belong to Jesus.” He was executed, kneeling next to his own grave- he was killed out of hatred for the faith.

Pope Francis spoke beautifully last month of how this young man is a great example for the youth of today, urging them to: “...keep their eyes fixed on this example: a courageous young person who knew where he had to go, who knew the love of Jesus in his heart and gave his life for him.”³ Today is a feast of hope for you and me, a glimpse into how God desires to make us holy, how He desires the salvation of all, not only of those who are known all over the world. No, this is a call to you and me to join their company, to cling to Jesus and his commandments, and to share in our Master’s joy.

² Pope Benedict XVI (*Spe Salvi* #45)

³ Pope Francis, Angelus, 6 October 2013