

All Saints Day Mass—Oct. 31-Nov. 1, 2015
Cathedral of St. Paul
Readings: Rev. 7:2-4, 9-14; 1 John 3:1-3; Matt. 5:1-12

Christians have revered the saints from the earliest times. In the fourth century, it was common practice to mark the anniversary of a martyr's death at the site where he or she was martyred. But because there were more martyrs than days in the year — and in order not to miss anyone, it became necessary to establish a general memorial. In the ninth century, Pope Gregory IV declared Nov. 1 as the day for the entire Church Militant (those on Earth) to honor all the Church Triumphant (those in Heaven).

Pope Benedict XVI explained that recalling all the saints helps “reawaken within us the great longing to be like them; happy to live near God, in his light, in the great family of God’s friends. Being a Saint means living close to God, to live in his family. And this is the vocation of us all...”¹ The Feast of All Saints recognizes those men, women, and children who have gone to their heavenly reward; people who in God’s eyes were just, were good, and who strove to do the right thing. They died in a state of grace and sincerely tried to do God’s will while on earth.

It is not a feast for people who are perfect, but for those who are willing to be perfected. How sad that the slogan “Well, nobody’s perfect,” has for some become a battle cry, even an excuse for doing wrong? Sure no one is perfect. But God is asking if you are willing to be perfected.

Consider the life Margaret of Cortona in 13th century Italy. The one positive influence in her life, her mother, died. While still a teenager, Margaret encountered tension with her stepmother, and left home. She loved the taste of freedom, and soon became the mistress of a nobleman, living a life of luxury in his castle. He said he would marry her someday, but that someday turned into years.

¹ Pope Benedict XVI homily, 1 November 2006, Basilica of St. Peter, Vatican City State

Even after the birth of their child, it became apparent that he had no intention. She grew to hate her life, but one day, he was killed. It was a true wake up call, and she vowed to change her life. At the age of 27 she humbly made her way back home; of her own accord she made a public confession about her sinful life, which embarrassed her father. She was alone again, enduring more hardship. But the Franciscans took her in while she worked as a nurse and cared for her child “I have put you as a burning light,” Jesus said to her later, “to enlighten those who sit in the darkness.” She joined the Third Order of St. Francis, cared for the poor, lived a life of prayer and penance and was eventually canonized a saint.

We all know of the story of St. Augustine. Though he committed a serious sin when he was just 16 years old, a sin for which he wept for years. Yet, he never let it paralyze him. He sought forgiveness and put it in the past. He devoted his life to preach the Gospel so that others would not make the same mistake as he. But his book, *The Confessions* upset many people at the time, not only because now, as a bishop, he acknowledged his sinful past.

What really bothered some people about his *Confessions*, was that Augustine wrote in the later chapters of the book that he was still very much troubled by temptations. He wrote, “There is in man an area which not even the *spirit of man* knows of.”² It is the *dark side*, a side we would like to forget but cannot. In my mind, Margaret and Augustine are two saints to whom we can all relate, because of their complete honesty. **They never painted a picture of themselves as a saint, which is precisely why they are ones.**

This All Saints day let us say a resounding “NO” to all the evil in the world. We say no to the reign of the devil, who contrary to some theologians, and some textbooks, does in fact exist, and is a real spiritual being. This is our special day of triumph, and we must celebrate, lest we give into the temptation to think that evil has won. Evil has not triumphed, nor will it.

² Augustine, *Confessions* Book X.5.7

Besides Margaret or Augustine we have the example of countless hidden saints, who have received no formal recognition, but quietly and without fanfare lived their lives in accordance with the Gospel and right judgment—this day belongs to them. We have plenty of models to admire and imitate, certainly not of perfect people, but those who allowed God to work in and through them.

And then, every once in a while, more often even if you really take time to notice, God sends someone our way who acts in a saintly manner or does a good deed. Yet it gently reminds us again that indeed, despite all the bad news in the world, that good will eventually triumph, and is present in our midst. May God bless you and keep you in your efforts to live a life worthy of the glories of heaven.