

SOLEMNITY OF ALL SAINTS — NOVEMBER 1

Behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" ~ Revelation 7:9-10

THE CHURCH recognizes that all Christians are called to be saints. Being a saint is not an extraordinary grace that is reserved for only a few — it is the goal of the Christian life for everyone. Christ left to the Church all the means necessary to fulfill his command, *"You, therefore, must be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect"* (Mt 5:48). It is not a pipe dream of the Lord but a reality if we choose to cooperate with all that he has left us.

The Church raises up certain saints for devotion and veneration as examples of holiness for all the faithful to see and imitate. A day on the Church calendar is set aside for each of them. So, for example, the Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi is October 4 and the Feast

of Saint Dominic is August 8. These saints are called "canonized" because they are included in the Canon of Saints, the official Church calendar. Once a person has been canonized, the Church recognizes that this saint is in Heaven and holds him or her up to the faithful for public veneration and intercessory prayer.

The list of canonized saints is not a list of all those who are in Heaven. That list is innumerable. Remember St. John's vision of a great multitude, or recall the great cloud of witnesses described in the Letter to the Hebrews. Aware that there are many more saints in Heaven than those who have been canonized, the Church sets aside this holy day, November 1, as the Feast of All Saints. Unlike most of the feast days for saints which are memorials, this day is a solemnity

which is the highest level of celebration and, therefore, also a holy day of obligation for all Catholics. On this day we remember all the saints of Heaven, both canonized and uncanonized. "Father, ... [t]oday," as we pray in the liturgy for this feast, "we keep the festival of your holy city, the Heavenly Jerusalem, our mother. Around your throne the saints, our brothers and sisters, sing your praise forever" (*The Roman Missal*, Preface of All Saints).

Any person who enters into the glory of Heaven is considered to be a saint, whether canonized or uncanonized.

The Feast of All Saints is a day to remember the example of all holy men and women who strove in their earthly life to serve the Lord and those in need. Who are they? They might be historical figures that served

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Angels and saints in paradise, 19th century lithograph

the Lord by bringing about peace during wartime; or they might be your relatives who served the Lord in their simple lives of service to the family. We cannot name them all, but each of us knows a few of them whose lives were spent following the Lord. Their example of holiness, whether expressed in heroic virtue or quiet service, inspires us still, and their prayers for us help us in our lives to be holy and in our struggle to be saints.

"Therefore," as Scripture says, "since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us" (Heb 12:1).

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