

2020 ALL SAINTS

The Church sets aside one day every year to honour all those men and women who over the centuries have made our world a more peaceful and beautiful place and are now with God in heaven. It is a day when we rejoice in the lives of these people and celebrate their victory over temptation and evil to become saints with God in heaven.

On this day we especially remember our departed loved ones- our parents, spouses, grandparents, brothers and sisters who are with God in heaven. We rejoice in the fact that they are now part of that glorious throng of saints which St John alludes to in our first Reading: "I saw a huge number of saints, impossible to count, from every nation, race, tribe and language shouting aloud to God, "Praise and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and strength to our God for ever and ever."" God's love is being lavished over them. Their joy is ecstatic. And this gives us wonderful consolation.

We think of those billions of good people over the ages who gave God and their families first place in their lives. People who cheerfully and with great love did obscure and routine jobs be it in the home or in the factory or fields, to support their families.

These faith-filled people are now in heaven and we call them 'saints. Their memory fills us with hope and inspires us, like them, to centre our lives on God.

The path to sainthood is given to us by Jesus in today's Gospel. It means trying to do the Will of God in all things. Jesus calls on us to strive to be humble, gentle, merciful, loving and pure of heart. He challenges us to hunger for truth, honesty and justice. He commands us to give comfort to the sorrowful and help to those in need.

It is very much our Catholic tradition to turn to the saints in heaven for help in times of difficulty. We have a sense that they delight in being asked by us for the help of their prayers.

I remember while working in Kiribati how my friend Br. Camillus lost the one and only key we had for the School Library. He was terribly embarrassed; and none too popular with the teachers who had classes scheduled for the library that day.

Over the next two days we searched everywhere for that key.

I was walking over to class at the beginning of the third day with Camillus when he said to me, "This morning at prayer I prayed to St. Therese of Lisieux to help someone to find that key." He had only just said this when he looked across to the School garden, which he took responsibility for, and said, "Look at that wretched weed. How did it get there?" He promptly strode across and pulled the weed up. And there under the weed was the missing key. I have never seen a man so stunned!

Was this just good luck or did St. Therese actually help Camillus find the key? I was there. If you say to me it was just good luck, I won't believe you!

You might say: "Surely Saints can't hear us? Aren't they infinitely removed from us? Isn't this business of praying to the Saints for help just superstition?"

The Church's Doctrine of the Communion of Saints says that the Saints have now moved into the heavenly realm and can be as close to us as we allow them to be. They are participating intensely in the infinite intelligence and power of God- that intelligence and power which embraces all of space and all of time. They are in the heavenly realm. So that popular Saints like St Joseph, St. Anthony, St. Therese, St Jude and St. Blaise who are bombarded with thousands of prayers every day can listen to them all and process them all. They are no longer intellectually limited by the finite nature of their former physical brain cells. They can function and process information as glorified beings.

A Saint, though, is perfectly attuned to God's Will. If a Saint listens to our prayer and moves to help us, it will be because our prayer is in accord with the Divine Plan.

In our day to day challenges, praying to a Saint for help is something we can do with great confidence. A second story.

I remember being driven into the heart of Glasgow to be shown St. Mungo's Presbyterian Cathedral by a staunchly Presbyterian friend, Isobel. She said to me, 'We will have a long walk because getting a park in the heart of Glasgow is impossible.' I said to her, 'Drive straight to St. Mungo's and I will say a prayer to St. Anthony to get us a parking spot.' Jokingly she replied, 'If we can get a park there, I'll become a Catholic!' A few minutes later, just as we were approaching the main door of St. Mungo's a parked car ducked out in front of us. And there was the park for us- right at the front door. There wasn't

even a parking meter! Once again- Don't tell me that was a fluke. I won't believe you!

Isobel is still a Presbyterian but has a tender devotion to St. Anthony!

The Saints are our heavenly brothers and sisters. It is such good sense to include them in our lives. They are our spiritual friends and help us through the ups and downs of life if we but call on them.

And God delights in our honouring of them through our prayers because God loves them with an infinite love.