

June 10, 2012

All Saints Sunday

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

"Saint" is a substantive drawn from a Latin adjective, *sanctus*. The baptized Teutonic equivalent is *heilig*, and the baptized equivalent in English is "holy." These words are all attempts to translate the Hebrew *qadosh* and the Greek *hagios*.

In the Bible the designation "saint" is not restricted to those who are already in glory, those who have attained their final destination in Christ, "the just men made perfect." The term designates, rather, all those who are in Christ, no matter how much their lives still need improvement.

Thus, St. Paul addressed the Corinthians as "saints," though he knew very well how far from perfect they were. Indeed, after calling them "saints," he spent most of two epistles telling the Corinthians what dreadful sinners they were.

The feast of All Saints, then, takes into consideration, not only that great cloud of witnesses portrayed in Hebrews, but those of us who are still far from what we should and need finally to be.

We venerate the saints, because we venerate one another. The sentiments we feel toward the saints are but extensions of the love we bear toward one another. The holiness of the saints is of the same nature as the holiness that all of us share.

How shall we describe this holiness? Let us consider three things:

First, sanctity or holiness is participatory. According to the Christian faith, sanctity (or holiness) is participation in the energies and life of God: *Tu solus sanctus*. The root of holiness is God, not human aspiration.

Holiness, therefore, is not merely moral improvement. It is ontological and psychological transformation in the Holy Spirit. Sanctity does not mean merely that we live differently; it means that we have a different principle of life. It is not, at root, a lifestyle. It is a life.

Consequently, holiness is first of all a gift from God. It is drawn, in part, from our handling of holy things: Baptism, Holy Communion, Holy Scripture, and so on. So many things handed to the Christian are holy. When he partakes of them, he either becomes holy by touching them, or he defiles them by touching

them.

Second, sanctity or holiness has the quality of an atmosphere. We take it with us. Thus, the Epistle to the Colossians begins: "To the saints and faithful brethren *in Christ* who are *in Colossae*." We observe the parallel construction, which twice uses the preposition "in": The holy and faithful brethren are said to be both "in Colossae" and "in Christ." That is to say, their being in Christ indicates how they are to be in Colossae. Being in Christ is a qualifier for how they are in Colossae.

Colossae is a different place, because it is the home---the dwelling place---for the holy and faithful brethren who are in Christ. And Colossae becomes the setting of their holiness and fidelity. Colossae is the place where they speak the truth in love; it is the context of their charity, their courage, their patience, their commitment, and their witness.

The Letter to Diognetus makes this point: "What the soul is in the body, that are Christians in the world. The soul is dispersed through all the members of the body, and Christians are scattered through all the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, yet is not of the body; and Christians dwell in the world, yet are not of the world" (ch. 6).

Third, sanctity is not optional. It is not, in essence, different from Justification. Indeed, Justification is an aspect of holiness. The sanctifying act, by which the Father makes us His children---brings us into Christ---is the cause of our Justification.

It is not as though eternal life were possible without holiness: "Pursue peace with all, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). It is difficult to think how this could have been said more clearly: Without holiness, we will not see the Lord. Holiness is not superfluous to our salvation, something extra with which we can dispense.

Hebrews tells us to "pursue" holiness. Even though holiness is a gift, it involves a measure of striving. Surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses, what do we do? We lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares, and we run with endurance the race that is set before us. Most of the time we know exactly what the pursuit of holiness requires of us. Our problem is not usually ignorance, but spiritual laziness, a certain flabbiness of the spirit. This is the reason the Bible uses athletic words to speak of the quest for holiness: running, fighting, striving, and training.

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