

# Solemnity of All Saints

Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski

November 1, 2020

This year we celebrate All Saints Day on a Sunday, which happens every 5 – 11 years. If you saw Bishop Johnston's video posting regarding All Saint's Day on the diocesan website, you know that this day marks a couple of milestones in Kansas City history:

- Five years ago, the last time that All Saints Day fell on a Sunday, Bishop Johnston moved to Kansas City where, later in November, he was installed as the sixth bishop of our diocese, and
- On that same Sunday five years ago, the Royals won the World Series.

Coincidence? I wonder?!?

Coincidence or not, I want to thank Bishop Johnston for being our caring shepherd for the last five years!

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Who's your favorite saint? I have multiple favorites:

- St. James the Greater: The apostle after whom I am named because I was born on July 25, his feast day. Additionally, I've had the good fortune to have been able to make multiple pilgrimages to his tomb in Santiago de Compostela, Spain.
- St. Ignatius of Loyola: The Spanish Basque priest, the founder of the Jesuits, who popularized a form of spirituality, Ignatian spirituality, with which I closely relate. His feast day is July 31. And...
- The Virgin Mary, the mother of God, whom we venerate with numerous feast days throughout the liturgical year, including:
  - December 8 as the Immaculate Conception
  - February 11 as Our Lady of Lourdes and
  - May 13 as Our Lady of Fatima.

Many saints have feasts days during the year. They include martyrs, kings and queens, missionaries, widows, theologians, parents, nuns and priests, and “everyday people” who lived lives of holiness, dedicated to serving God with all their hearts, minds, and souls. Many of us, lay and religious individuals alike, have found inspiration from their lives, particularly in the stories of saints who devoted themselves in service to the poor, sick, and disenfranchised, such as St. Mother Teresa and St. Vincent de Paul. Many of the saints who were persecuted for their faith, such as St. Stephen and St. Perpetua, showed remarkable forgiveness and patiently suffered through their trials and tortures. Some are revered for their simplicity of life, including St. Francis of Assisi and St. Thérèse of Lisieux. While several, notably St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine, were theologians and writers who shaped Western thought for centuries.

But what about the saints whose names, and the details of their lives, have been lost to history? In addition to the saints honored with feast days, these saints unknown but to God, are who we celebrate today on the Solemnity of All Saints. But how did such a feast day, as All Saints, come about?

This feast has its origins in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century when, in Rome, Pope Boniface IV converted the Pantheon, a Roman temple to all the gods, into a church, the Basilica of St. Mary and the Martyrs, which is among the oldest continuously active Catholic churches in the world. Since that time, the universal Church has honored "All Saints," as examples of holiness, during the liturgical year.

But, what can we in this day and age learn from the saints? What virtues do the saints have in common; virtues that we can embrace? Humility: I believe that **humility** is a common thread that is woven through the lengthy historical tapestry that is "All the Saints." Humility: A rare virtue today in this age when narcissism and self-idolatry are common throughout society, particularly in the political and entertainment worlds. The saints had no illusions of grandeur; they realized their sinfulness. They recognized that left to their own devices and human efforts, they were hopelessly lost. The saints discarded their human pride, the root of all sin, and fully aware of their insignificance before the infinite goodness and holiness of God, they humbled themselves, developing a deep-rooted sense of humility before God; they were..."poor in spirit."

"Poor in spirit..." That's what Jesus is calling us to become in today's Gospel. The beatitudes begin with "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven." This first beatitude is the foundation upon which all the others rest. Without being "poor in spirit," humble before God, we don't stand a chance of being blessed as meek, righteous, merciful, or any of the others.

When we recognize our limitations, abandon our sinful human pride, acknowledge our complete dependence upon God, and submit to the will of the Father, we become "poor in spirit." At this point, we'll open ourselves up to be embraced by the Father's love with which he continually enfolds us, and then, we can truly be called "children of God" with the hope of joining "all the saints" in the kingdom of heaven.