

Solemnity of All Saints

In the past, the Saints have enjoyed a tremendous popularity: the churches were full of their statues and recourse to them was perhaps more than to God. There was a saint for truck drivers, for students, for lost items, for eye diseases and even for a sore throat. They were considered a kind of intermediaries that had the function to “soften” the impact of a God considered too big and too far away, a little unapproachable and somewhat foreign to our problems.



Today the tendency to resort to the saint to ask him/her to present to God a request is fading. We turn to the Lord more and more, directly, with the confidence of children. The saints—Mary too—are rightly regarded as sisters and brothers who, with their lives indicate a path to follow Christ and invite us to pray all the time, along with them, to the one Father.

The word saint indicates the presence in certain people of a divine and beneficial force that allows one to stand out, to distance oneself from what is imperfect, weak, ephemeral. Among the people who appeared in this world, only Christ has possessed the fullness of this force of goodness and only he can be declared saint, as we sing in the Gloria: “You alone are holy.”

But we, too, can rise up to him and become partakers of his holiness. He came into the world to accompany us towards the holiness of God, towards the unattainable goal that he has shown us: “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48).

His first disciples were identified by various names. They were called “Galileans,” “Nazarenes,” and in Antioch, “Christians.” It was about some derogatory designations: “Galileans” was synonymous with “insurgents;” “Nazarenes” referred to the despised village from where their Master came; “Christian” means “anointed,” that is, followers of a self-styled “Lord’s anointed” who ended up on the gallows.

These were not the titles that they employed between them. They qualified themselves as “brothers,” “believers,” “the disciples of the Lord,” “the perfect ones,” “people of the way,” and ... “saints.”

Paul wrote his letters “to all the saints who live in the city of Philippi ...” (Phil 1:1); “to the saints who are at Ephesus...” (Eph 1:1); “to the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ who live in Colossae...” (Col 1:2); “to all the saints in the whole of Achaia” (2 Cor 1:1); “to all of God’s favorite in Rome and that you are called to be saints...” (Rom 1:7). He did not write to the saints in heaven, but to real people who lived in Philippi, Ephesus, Corinth, Colossae, and Rome. They were the saints.

A saint is every disciple, whether he or she is already in heaven with Christ or who still lives as a pilgrim on this earth.

In the Orthodox temples, the saints who are in heaven are painted along the walls at eye level, standing, as the resurrected ones mentioned by the seer of the Revelation (Rev 7:9). It is the way in which one wants to remind all participants in the celebration that the saints in heaven, although they may be contemplated only with the eyes of faith, they continue to live alongside the saints of the earth. They are part of the community called to give thanks to the Lord.

To internalize the message, we repeat:

“Holy is your family, O Lord, in heaven and on earth.”

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