

The Communion of Saints

Homily, 1st November 2017
All Saints' Day

Mat 5,1-12

father G. Papparone o.p.

After my speech we will all together recite the Creed, the synthesis of our faith, and we will pronounce the following words: ***I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.***

What is and where is this “holy” Church?

It certainly is not outside of us, because we ourselves are the Church. It exists where there are some believers, and in a material sense it coincides with the believers.

In the most authentic sense, on the contrary, the Church coincides with sanctity.

Cardinal Journet, while preparing the Second Vatican Council, in his Treaty on the Church, strongly underlined this truth, which really struck me, as a student in theology at the time.

I had lived outside the Church during many years; as it happens to a lot of children at around 9-10 years of age, after attending the catechism I had abandoned the religious routines.

Going back, after so many years, to the religious community and hearing this most beautiful truth struck me in a strong way: **the boundaries of the Church are invisible, the boundaries of the Church pass through a man's heart.**

Therefore, what we see externally is just a material belonging to the Church, and this is the reason why we pray for the souls who are in Purgatory, we also say that there is a Hell, where unfortunately also those who have lived in the Church and have later abandoned it can go, or those who have misbehaved; unfortunately there are also priests who live in a situation of deadly sin...

Today we celebrate *the Church as one and holy*, and in the Apostolic Creed we also recite, “we believe in the ***Communion of Saints***”. This means that **all the members of the Church who are one with Jesus are also one with one another, because the truth of the Church is the *mystic Body of Christ*.**

The nature of the Church is spiritual, as is the essence of Eucharist.

When we were baptized, we received a spiritual nature that is a way of participating – in a way that is equal for all of us – to the *Body of Christ*; this is why we are “one thing”.

Therefore, the believer is the one who, through Baptism, has been made ***Saint*** thanks to his participation to the sanctity of Jesus, and he walks in this world trying to make this sanctity, this Communion with God that he has received freely, extend to the whole of his acting.

Today we are indeed celebrating the memory of all saints, also and mainly those unknown, because for those who are publicly lifted up on the altars we already celebrate their lives, all along the year... In this solemn occasion we therefore want to celebrate most of all those anonymous saints, the unknown ones, those who live a life of hidden sanctity, of whom nobody knows anything.

Moreover, we are also celebrating those saints who came before us, because the Communion of the Saints is extended also to those who are part of the “triumphant Church” – as people once used to say – that is the blessed ones who already are in *Heaven*.

Today's celebration consists therefore in praising this huge communion that is the essence of the Church!

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I would really like that you, on your way home, could carry this concept with you: **the *Communion of Saints* is the essence of the Church, and the Church only exists in the communion.**

Communion, which is not the result of our efforts, volunteer, moral, theological, and so on, but is only the result of the gift of Jesus' *grace*, through the gift of his love.

Of course, there is also a moral and social kind of sanctity, but this is the manifestation of the sanctity that is given to us by God.

We are reminded of this in the first letter of Saint John: *dearest, you see what great love our Father gave us to be called children of God and we really are* – he underlines.

Being children of God is therefore not only a concept!

Sometimes some of you say to me: “Ok, but aren't we all children of God? Also those belonging to other religions? Also the atheists?”.

This is true, all human beings are “children of God” because they were created by Him, but He created animals as well, and therefore are these “children of God” too?...

We need to clarify this concept:

When we talk in a Christian sense of the divine filiation, we are talking about something completely different, not about the act of creating, but about the participation – through the Sacraments – in the life of Jesus himself, who naturally is man and God.

We really are children of God: in Jesus we are united with the celestial Father through a reality which is not material, mundane, but is divine.

Saint John also says: *from now on we are children of God, but what we will be hasn't been revealed yet*; our being “children of God” is, as the parable of the seed states, embryonic, it is waiting to grow, to blossom, to transform.

There is this divine life in ourselves, but it is not developed yet, and the meaning of a Christian life is indeed this one: **to develop and to bring to perfection the divine life that is in ourselves.**

The essence of a Christian life is not about going to church on Sunday, neither is about praying, but is about letting ourselves be transformed by the Holy Spirit in order to fully become children of God in the sense that I have underlined before. The prayers, the mass, the sacraments, they are necessary to reach this goal.

God gives us His grace in a special way through two Sacraments – Eucharist and Reconciliation – which should be celebrated with a deeper awareness, a deeper gravity and participation.

Sometimes some people say to me: “Last Sunday I couldn't go to Church because I had to feed my grandchildren”...

Are we kidding? What does this “I couldn't” mean?

The Mass is the Communion with the Father, it is an encounter with His redeeming love!

Today we came here to be saved by God's grace, to be transformed!

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Not just to bring Him some prayers, some good intentions so that we can live our lives a bit better! Jesus is not a crutch; He said it Himself: *you don't sew a piece of new fabric over an old dress.* **Jesus didn't come here to patch our life, to repair something broken; he came here to create something new!**
He wants us to become, in fact, children of God.

Sure enough, Saint John ends this passage by saying: *all those who have this hope, they will purify themselves as He is pure*; it's all in here, dearest, in this verse there is everything.

From now on we are children of God, but what we will be hasn't been revealed yet; those who have this hope purify themselves: what does this **hope** mean?

It doesn't mean: "let's hope it will be like this"; this is not a Christian hope.

Hope – the Church teaches us – is **certainty**, as Saint Paul writes.
Hope is a motion of the heart, the tension towards the reach of Good.

Regardless of faith, also from a strictly human point of view, hope is that interior force that moves us, makes us act, work, sweat, suffer, to reach what we believe is good for us.
Christian hope is a movement of our soul that makes us tend towards the achievement of the **purity of the heart**.

Whoever has this hope will purify himself: during our normal life – our daily, simple, working life – **we have to live with this perspective, that is to say that each day has to be an occasion to be nearer to this purification.**

In the first reading it is said: *I saw a multitude...* and Saint John asks the old man who these people in a white dress are and he answers: *they are those who have washed and purified their clothes with the Lamb's blood*; in other words, they are those who have lived with this hope, those who feed themselves with this hope and with this hope go and celebrate the Mass and the Reconciliation with God.

I understand that psychologically this may not be so easy, but we have to overcome the psychological difficulties that we might have regarding the Sacrament of the Confession, because this is a gift, not a punishment!

The Reconciliation with God is not an execution, it should be a joy, and it should be perceived as an extraordinary chance we have to free our heart from evil.

How can going to the Confession be a burden? Not finding the time, feeling it as something hard, when instead in that confessional we can receive our freedom from the evil through God's grace?

We should run to confess!

At least once a month, to show our sicknesses to the Father.

Many people don't go to confess their sins to a priest, but they go to a psychotherapist...

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Some others don't go to either of them and then live as neurotics all day long; this is the problem of human beings...

Therefore, dearest, **on this celebration of All Saints' let's remind ourselves that we have been pardoned, that God had given us His life, that He has made us His children and let's make up our minds and start walking after Him, towards Him, to reach that state that we don't know yet, but that through hope we know we are able to reach.**

May the Lord be praised.