

Homily for All Saints' Sunday
(November 7, 2010)

In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Later in Daniel's vision he asks an angel to explain the purpose of the four beasts – which scholars have come to understand as representing the kingdoms of Babylon, Media, Persia and Macedonia respectively – and he is told their purpose is to make war on the holy ones of God.

Now according to Jesus, the blessed ones are the poor, the hungry, the mourning, and those hated and excluded by others for being affiliated with the Son of Man, who is Jesus Christ. The same “one like a Son of Man” from Daniel by the way.

Now, if you were at the Requiem for All Souls' this past Tuesday, you would have heard me quote former Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey who defined the Church's mission as being in the business of making saints, that is “blessed one.”

It is a path we are all on. However the Church recognizes that some have, by the grace of God and in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, attained to the holiness of Christ a bit sooner than others.

These persons we acknowledge by calling them “saint” and holding them up as role models and intercessors of faith. While others of us take a little longer than this mortal life to grow into the perfection of Christ put on in baptism, nonetheless the journey into sainthood is ours as well, which, according to Daniel and Our Lord is not as glorious a journey as we might think. Neither is it something that our society would consider healthy and appropriate.

The lives of the saints are glorious and filled with miraculous stories and intimate visions of Christ because it is God's glory manifest at the expense of their own. It is God's love expressed at the loss of self-love. It is God's mission embarked upon at the cost of their own desires and ambitions.

It is not surprising then that those the Church considers to be saints are, in almost every circumstance, people whom society rejects as eccentrics and non-conformists and in turn fiercely persecutes by often inhuman means.

It's not only society unfortunately. Take a read through some of the lives of the saints such as John of the Cross who was imprisoned by his own order or Benedict whose own monks tried to poison because of his attempts to clean up their proclivities.

The saints of God and those becoming saints who hold fast to the faith and live lives in conformity to God's will regardless of the world around them, can truly identify with Daniel's vision of the holy ones being persecuted by the kingdoms of this world.

Why such persecution for following Christ? Well, Jesus simple answer is, "for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets." "If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you *out* of the world – therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'Servants are not greater than their master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you..."

So persecution of the holy ones of God result because we do not conform to the world's accepted standards and ideologies. We stand out. We are different. Our very lives and the Holy One whom is revealed in living the gospel, points to an alternative way

of being; a threatening way to those who fall under the judgment of that same gospel. For the “holy ones” life is not always one of comfort and security, for faithfulness will regularly lead to rejection.

Before we lament the struggle of following Christ, we should not forget that Our Lord fully and willingly embraced the Cross. He must have done so for a reason. And the reason was he saw within its pain the means to the salvation of the world. He understood that the benefits for all far outweighed the personal suffering he would endure. And he did so bearing the sins of all people, for all time.

And so he in turn encourages his disciples to share this perspective with him. To see suffering in the light of God’s transforming love and so rejoice in the rejection of the world, which actually reveals that they belong to Christ.

But to see with these eyes of faith a person must come to a place of sacrificial offering; the offering of one’s entire being to God in ministry and mission. This is an offering of substance – of all that we are and all that we have for the good of others– not a peripheral giving.

This of course is why Christianity is so difficult for people. They do not fully realize the type of real sacrifice that is required; the type of authentic offering of self needed in order to grow into the holiness of Christ and thus one day meet God face to face. Not only this, many fail to see the glory that is revealed in suffering, becoming disgruntled in not finding immediate answers and instant gratification.

It is so scary to people in fact, that everywhere I have gone as a priest, the surest way I have discovered to have people – even Christians - reject me is to invite them to

grow in an authentic and intimate relationship with Jesus, one which challenges them to transformation into the likeness of Christ. I think we would much rather re-make Jesus (and his Church) in our own image.

I can only assume that this reaction is against a perceived loss of self and one's personal agenda or power or independence. Or perhaps it goes against our culture of just wanting to receive our twenty dollar spa absolution and not have to worry about the hard work of growth.

Can you imagine then how people responded to Jesus' message: "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven...."

Have you ever praised God for a friend betraying you? Have you ever thanked God for someone spitting on you and calling you hurtful names? Have you given God glory whenever a loved one has spurned you or upon overhearing someone say what they really think of you?

Well, though we might think it masochistic to do so, a common thread running through the writings of the saints is their ability to rejoice when persecuted. They can do so, only because they see rejection not as something negative, such as punishment by God. But rather, they understand it to be evidence; proof that God loves them, that they are, in the eyes of the world, a Christian. That Christ has a claim on them and thus, eternal life and salvation is their inheritance. Now this, I would say, is definitely something to rejoice over.

As hard as life is, the journey of faith is ever harder. It must be this way, for anything easy has never in our experience proven to be worthwhile. Besides, this world and its fancies are fleeting. Nothing we see can come with us. But the treasure we store up in heaven by faith and good works,; our very souls, these are eternal. In heaven with God is our wealth, our feast and our joy.

And they are made all the more brilliant in the contrast of the dark moments of life into which the Epiphany light of God has dawned. I pray you will discover in every one of the sacred moments of darkness life has to offer the heart of the gospel as revealed in the Cross of Christ. The Cross is divine love rooted in the pain of God. But this love cannot be observed objectively outside of our human experience. May this love alone grant you the grace to experience rejection as the depth of Christ's heart crowned with thorns; God's love in his pain and in your pain.