

OCTOBER 30, 2022

One change in the Liturgy after Vatican II, noticeable to clergy but not to laity, was the removal of the Hour of Prime from the Breviary, or Liturgy of the Hours. Traditionally, the “Hours” in the Church for daily, formal prayer, to which clergy are bound, were the predawn Hour of Matins, the dawn Hour of Lauds, the post-dawn Hour of Prime, the midmorning Hour of Tierce, the midday Hour of Sext, the midafternoon Hour of None, the dusk hour of Vespers, and the full dark hour of Compline. Many of the clergy experienced this daily routine of 8 pauses for formal prayer during the day as burdensome, and most found it impossible to pray those “Hours” at even approximately their proper time. The Council called for the praying of what we call “The Divine Office” (“office” in the old sense of “duty”) to be streamlined and simplified. Part of that streamlining was the abolition of the post-dawn Hour of Prime; which, in a way, was too bad (though the desire to simplify and streamline the Office was certainly understandable).

Part of that old Hour of Prime was a reading from the “Martyrology” for the day, an account of a Saint’s life and death. Now, one thing that desperately did need change long before 1962 was the “Martyrology”, which was far too full of old legends, fictionalized stories about Saints in which miracles were so common that they became downright boring (as I noted a couple of weeks ago, in the much more sober Bible miracles are actually rather rare, and therefore exciting). I shed no tears for the disappearance of the old Martyrology. That said, I sometimes think that an authentic account of a Saint’s life and death should be part of the daily reading and prayer of every priest and deacon - and possibly even of every Catholic. Authentic “Lives of the Saints” show us that, again and again, the Lord Jesus does with real people what He did with Zacchaeus. He did not just call Zacchaeus to conversion, He empowered Zacchaeus’ conversion with that spiritual force we call “Grace” and turned a sinner into a Saint.

I love reading the Lives of the Saints, and do make that part of my daily prayer. I love also the the November 1 Feast of All Saints. The Saints include those publicly recognized by the whole Catholic Church, those who receive only regional or local honor, and those who have received no public recognition at all, but whose names are inscribed in Heaven, and who rejoice forever before the Throne of God and before the Lamb.

On All Saints Day, as on the feast day of any Saint, we worship God alone. To the Saints we give veneration and honor, because they cooperated with the working of Divine Grace. To God we give Adoration, because it is His Grace, even more than their cooperation, that has made ordinary human beings, always to some degree sinful, into Saints. We do ask them to pray for us, and we ask that confidently. If we ask our friends and neighbors here on Earth to pray for us, fully knowing that we and they do not really know how to pray as we ought, much more should we ask the Saints in Heaven to pray for us, since they, sharing in Divine Life, really do know how to pray, and can pray with power. We honor the Saints, and with them we praise and thank Jesus Christ our Lord, true God and true Man, the Redeemer and Savior of Humanity, because He is the One who made them Saints. Like Zacchaeus, they cooperated with Him; but His was the call that summoned them to holiness, and His was the Grace that empowered them to answer that summons.

Occasionally even people who should know better will say that the Feast of All Saints has its origins in some sort of ancient “Celtic” festival (whatever “Celtic” means these days - it used to mean a group of related languages, which is sober and sensible, but now it is used so vaguely that I have given up using the word altogether) In fact, as you might suppose, a celebration of All the Saints is an ancient Christian practice, with its roots more in classical Syria than in ancient Ireland. Sometime before his death in 373, the Syrian poet and musician St. Ephrem wrote a hymn for May 13, a feast for “The Martyrs of All the Earth”. During the last decades of the Fourth Century, that Feast spread, and changed. It changed, as Christians realized that the Martyrs are not the only Saints. It became the Feast of All Saints, celebrated by the Syrian Church on May 13, by the Assyrian Church on Friday of Easter Week, and by the Greek Church on the Sunday after Pentecost. The Feast of All Saints was slow to spread to the West. It was only on May, 13, 609 that Pope Boniface IV dedicated the long abandoned and recently remodeled pagan temple called the Pantheon (still standing and still impressive) to All the Saints, and directed that the Roman Church would observe a Feast of All Saints every May 13. Independently, it seems, the Irish Church decided that there should be an annual feast of All Saints, but it was not set to go with some allegedly “Celtic” Fall fest. The early Irish Church set its Feast of All Saints to go with the Easter Season, establishing 20 April as the date.

I suppose that may be more detail than you were looking for, but I felt a little feisty this week and felt that the point needed to be made that All Saints is not a baptized version of some sort of supposedly “Celtic” pagan festival. All Saints is an impressively ancient and authentically Christian feast.

How did it get to be celebrated on November 1? It wasn't any “Celts” but the early Medieval English who did that. We know that in 800 the Frankish-Roman Emperor Charlemagne's English advisor on all things religious, the great scholar Alcuin, observed the Feast of All Saints on November 1, preceded by a three day “mini-Lent” of daily fasting. Apparently Alcuin had brought the November 1 date for All Saints from the north English Kingdom of Northumbria. Alcuin's good friend Arno, Archbishop of Salzburg, persuaded the Bavarian Church to start celebrating All Saints' Day on November 1. Rather quickly all the other Churches of Charlemagne's Empire, which was the ancestor of France and Germany, began to celebrate All Saints' Day on November 1, though the Roman Church, usually conservative, stuck to May 13 for quite a while. Eventually, as the November 1 date began to spread through northern Italy, the Roman Church gave in. Since about 900 All Saints' Day has been celebrated throughout the Roman Catholic Church on November 1.

Whatever the date of its celebration, the Feast of All Saints is the feast of what the Book of Revelation describes as the Heavenly Jerusalem. The citizens of the Heavenly Jerusalem are chosen by God from every race, language and nation. He has no preference for any race, language, or nation over any other. He has chosen people of every age to be Saints, since His Grace is not dependent for its effects on human maturity or strength. For the ranks of His Saints He has chosen royalty, farmers, soldiers, merchants, judges, bishops and priests, deacons, monks, nuns, husbands and wives, widows, slaves, and nobles. For every non criminal

occupation or state of life, there is a Saint. Every Saint became a Saint by taking God's Grace into his or her daily life and work. It was by daily cooperating with God's daily given Grace, in good times and in bad, for better and for worse, for richer and for poorer, that they all became Saints. The Lord Jesus did not command Zacchaeus to change his occupation. He commanded him to be honest in his occupation, and to carry out his occupation for the greater glory of God. There is no non criminal occupation which cannot be carried out for the greater glory of God. There is no non criminal occupation in which someone cannot, inspired and aided by God's Grace, become a Saint.

On All Saints' Day, Holy Church calls all Catholics to holiness. Rather, the Lord Jesus, through Holy Church, calls out to all of us "Today I must stay at your house". The Lord Jesus, through Holy Church's worship, knocks at the door, and says "To whoever opens, I will sit down to supper with him, and he with Me" (Revelation, 3:20) To all who sit down to the Supper at which Jesus Christ is both Host and Meal, the possibility of a truly holy life is extended. All who sit down to Supper with Jesus Christ, Host and Meal, can become Saints.

It is possible, frankly, to pay too much attention to the process of people being "canonized", or enrolled on the formal list ("canon" in Greek) of recognized Saints. The Church needs to regulate public honor given to the deceased, to make sure that such honor is appropriate. We need to have a process for canonizing people, putting them on the list. That said, the list of names on earth is extremely tiny, compared to the vast multitude in Heaven. It is not a Church ceremony that makes someone truly a Saint, but God's Grace, with which they have cooperated. It is not some papal ceremony that enables anyone to enter into Heaven, but the Lord Jesus Christ saying "Well done, good and faithful servant! Come, share your Master's joy!" The Church's canonization is merely a necessary precaution about public veneration and honor. We know that there are countless Saints uncanonized and never to be canonized. We venerate and honor them today. Whether the Pope declaring someone a Saint is a so-called "infallible" act or not, I do not know. It seems to be a debatable point theologically, and I simply do not know. I do know that a formal process to "certify" someone as worthy of public veneration by the Church is necessary. I also know that the Church's process is affected by politics, and by the personal preferences and prejudices of bishops and popes. Some holy people I could name, one of whom I connect to a minor miracle, have had their formal process of canonization put on hold simply because the relevant bishop or the pope doesn't like or understand them. The Saints of God don't care, since they are overflowing with joy before the throne of God and before the Lamb. Whether the Church formally recognizes them or not, they, like the marvelous St. Therese of Lisieux, spend their Heaven doing good on Earth. To some degree, I don't care either. Recognizing the need for the Church to regulate public honor paid to Saints, I don't give my personal Saints any public honor, but I do have them in my heart on All Saints' Day, which I always celebrate with great enthusiasm.

The Saints are a diverse assembly, perhaps too diverse for some bishops and popes to handle. Their personalities and occupations are diverse, but there are some things that all the Saints have in common. All the Saints have been formed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. All the Saints have been saved from sin by the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ. All the Saints have been promised

Eternal Life by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. All the Saints have been filled with the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ. He is the Way to Heaven for all the Saints. He is the saving and sanctifying Truth for all the Saints. He is the true Life of all the Saints. All of the Saints can say with St. Paul "I live now no longer I, but Christ in me" They retain their very diverse personalities, but all show forth in their lives the presence of the One Mediator between God and Man, the God-Man Jesus Christ.

It is time to conclude.

The Saints are examples for us, yes. They are also connected to us, members of the Mystical Body of Christ with us. We are the Church Militant on earth, still fighting against the world, the flesh and the devil. The Saints are the Church Triumphant in Heaven, "who have come out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb . . . therefore they are before the Throne of God" (Revelation 7:14-15) Their example for us is not just an example of ethical conduct in difficult circumstances (and whose life does not have some difficult circumstances?). Their lives show, above all, how the Spirit of Jesus Christ makes those who cooperate with it truly great, and eventually perfect in holiness.