

HOMILY

The Solemnity of All Saints Day *November 1, 2007*

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Today we celebrate All Saints Day. Today is a universal celebration that honors and remembers all saints, known and unknown. What is it that makes a saint in the first place? Is it personal virtue and discipline? Or is it a concern for the poor and the outcast? Is a saint pious and austere; or is a saint merry and outgoing?

First of all, a saint's life is not dominated by *things*. Jesus said it best—you can not worship God and mammon. In today's lesson he said, "*Blessed are the poor.*" We might argue over what Jesus meant by that, but it's crystal clear in the teachings of Jesus that he considered material possessions a potential obstacle to Christian discipleship.

James Patterson and Peter Kim wrote a book that had lists in it. The title was The Day America Told the Truth. Researchers asked Americans what they would be willing to do for \$10 million.

- ▶ 25% would abandon their entire family.
- ▶ 25% would abandon their church.
- ▶ 22% would become prostitutes for a week or more.
- ▶ 16% would give up their American citizenship.
- ▶ 16% would leave their spouses.
- ▶ 7% would kill a stranger
- ▶ 3% would put their children up for adoption.

There is a fierce battle going on for America's soul and it's not between left and right or black and white. It's between the worship of God and mammon. We're in love with things and those things are becoming a substitute for healthy relationships. Our love of things is stronger than our desire to serve God. A saint is someone who is not dominated by things.

Secondly, a saint is not focused on himself or herself, but upon God and others. This is why the saint can be blessed even when persecuted. A saint is not obsessed with position in society or the approval of others. It's ironic, isn't it? The more people sit around and think whether they are happy or not the more miserable they are likely to be. If they could just forget themselves, they could find life quite fulfilling.

Saints don't take much time thinking about themselves. Their focus is on God and their neighbors. A saint doesn't have to go to Calcutta like Mother Teresa or Africa like Albert Schweitzer. But neither are they part of the "Me" generation. They take life seriously, but not themselves. They know that life is too short to sit around and fret over little things. A saint is an important part of his or her church and an important part of his or her community.

This brings us to the third characteristic of a saint. A saint leaves the world a better place because he or she has been there. Someone said that a saint is not only a sinner who has a past, but by God's design has a future.

When I think of a saint, I am reminded of a story from life. In 1898, a young bank clerk named William Porter was convicted of embezzling money from a bank in which he had worked. He spent the next three years in prison. In prison, Porter was determined to change his life. He began writing short stories to earn money for his family. One of his prison guards, a man by the name of Oren Henry, encouraged William Porter. He believed that the former bank clerk could make a fresh start after his release.

One day, the prisoner asked the prison guard for an unusual favor: could he have Oren Henry's name? You see, a new man starting a new life needed a new name. Oren Henry graciously agreed, but he made William Porter promise that he would take good care of that name.

In 1901, after his release from prison, William Sydney Porter became a well-known writer; his short stories are considered classics of English literature. You may have heard of this reformed writer yourself. His pen name was O. Henry.

How about you? Are you a seeker? Is there a void in your life that only God can fill? God knows your needs. God awaits you with open arms. Is today your day to begin anew?