

HOMILY

THE SOLEMNITY OF ALL SAINTS DAY

ANNUAL BEREAVEMENT MASS

November 1, 2009 ~ 10:00 A.M. Liturgy

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St. John the Evangelist Parish
Davison, Michigan

The other day I heard a story about a ten-year-old girl named Sarah Meyers whose grandfather had died. Her grandpa hadn't been feeling well for some time. He went to the hospital for some tests just to find out what was wrong. He died two weeks later and Sarah was not able to go to the hospital to see her grandfather before he died. She never got the chance to say one final good-bye. Not only was this her first experience with death, but Sarah was additionally upset that she didn't see him in those days before he died for she wanted to have one last talk with him.

One October she came home from a friend's birthday party with a helium balloon. Sarah went into the house. When she came back out, she was carrying the balloon and an envelope. Inside the envelope was a letter she had written to her grandfather. The envelope was addressed "To Grandpa Bernie in Heaven up High." In the letter Sarah wrote: "Hi, Grandpa, How are you doing? What's it like up there?" The letter ended with Sarah telling her grandfather that she loved him and that she hoped somehow he could hear what she was telling him.

In mid-December a letter arrived addressed to Sarah Meyers and Family. The letter bore a York, Pennsylvania, postmark and had been mailed by a man named Donald Kopp. The letter began:

Dear Sarah, Family and Friends,

Your letter to Grandpa Bernie apparently reached its destination and was read by him. I understand they can't keep material things up there so it drifted back here to earth and I found it the other day. They just keep thoughts, memories, love and things like that in heaven with God.

Donald Kopp

The truth is Donald Kopp, a 63-year-old retired receiving clerk who just happened to be a grandfather, too, found the balloon with the letter attached while he was hunting and hiking. The balloon had traveled almost 600 miles through four states.

When Sarah read the letter she said, “At night I would think about it. I just wanted to hear from grandpa somehow. In a way, I think that I have heard from him and now I know he is okay.”

Today, we remember 93 of our loved ones who have gone on. Like Sarah, we too send an envelope with prayers and love and sentiments. With love and deep affection we remember them. We trust that they are with God. We give thanks for the contributions they made to our lives. Today we remember those saints who have gone on to glory.

On this day we remember those ordinary people of extraordinary commitment. We remember those special people who have meant so much to our faith development—mothers and fathers, spouses, brothers, sisters, teachers, close relatives and friends. We remember those special persons and give thanks to God for the privilege of walking beside them and for their influence in our lives.

We remember them with thanksgiving.

But today’s good news, as it is every day, is **God!** God’s grace makes this day one of hope and not of superstition, of joy and not of mourning, of vision and not of dreaming, of truth and not of resignation—a celebration of life that sets aside the dirge of death.

Today is the day we sweep the horizons of history and of heaven, all at the same time. All that happens this day is caught up in this one fact: God remembers. He remembers us and he remembers his promises. He recalls his promises and leads his people forth in joy with shouts of thanksgiving. *Alleluia! Alleluia! Blessed are those who trust wholly in God, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

On this All Saints Sunday, we also acknowledge that we build upon the foundations they laid. The disciples spent the better part of three years traveling around with Jesus. After Pentecost, it was time for the disciples to put the teaching of Jesus into practice. We follow in their footsteps.

Today we remember those saints who have gone on to shine in the presence of God. Who are those saints? They are men, women and children who are made not out of plaster and moral perfection but out of human flesh. These are the ones who have their rough edges and their blind spots like everyone else but whose lives are transparent to something so extraordinary that every so often it stops us dead in our tracks.

Saints are ordinary people whose lives reflect the life of Jesus.

Jesus was teaching one day among a great number of people, ordinary people like you and me. In the crowd that day were people who were sick, people who were poor, people who were looking for relief from their problems. Looking over the crowd Jesus said, “*Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.*”

The poor are the forgotten, nameless people even today. We are much more fascinated with the lives of the rich and the famous. But Jesus doesn't forget them. He called them blessed. Then he turned to the hungry and those who weep. He called them blessed as well. In the coming kingdom, those who are hungry will be filled and those who weep will be filled with laughter. His words gave hope to those who felt there was nothing at all to look forward to.

There is a lot to look forward to in our journey. Day by day we get closer to seeing the Lord face to face. But in the meantime, we have to learn from those who have gone before us and make the best of today and tomorrow and every day.

I like that little prayer that is many times is placed in our church:

Lord, let me live this day as if it is my first day,
my last day, my only day.
And, dear Lord, help me to make it my best day.

Who are the saints? They are people like you and me who kept trying every day to do their best. Sometimes they failed; sometimes they took steps backward. But with the Lord's help, they continued on the road with the light shining brightly.

And so this is a great day to remember those who have gone on, those who shine brightly with God's light, and those who by their light will help us to let our light shine brighter every day.

