

## **FR. JOHN'S HOMILY**

### **All Souls Day, November 1, 2020**

Last week Deacon John talked about the GOAT: Greatest Of All Time. In each sport there are many arguments for who is the greatest of all time. However, in God's word, His Commandments is The Shema - "Love God with all you heart, all your mind, all your soul and strength". The second is "you shall love your neighbor as yourselves". This is the greatest of all time; there is no greater commandment.

The Feast of All Saints celebrates the GOATs - the men and women who have lived out the greatest commandment in the life of the church. The greatest commandment finds welcoming hearts who live it out; they are the saints. Just as it is hard to talk about the greatest of all time in sports, it would hard to talk about the greatest saints in the life of the church. To some the Church has even bestowed the name 'the Great': St. Albert, St. George, St. Leo, St. Anthony, St. Basil, St. Gertrude, and St. Catherine. Many refer to John Paul II as the Great. To be given the title 'the Great', they had to have a worldwide influence on the life of the Church.

By our Baptism we are called to be part of this great communion of saints. Yet most of us don't take it too seriously. After all, saints are special; and we say, "I am not special." We admire the saints, but to be like them is another thing. I remember my brother, Tim, helping his young daughter, Julianna, pick out a saint for class. As they looked at all the saints, she liked the ones that had wonderful dresses, robes, holding flowers with headsets and crowns. When reading about their lives, she came upon one that said, "and she was burned at the stake, she was beheaded, she was thrown to the lions." Julianna immediately said, "No Daddy, I don't want to be her." We all admire and are inspired by the Saints. But to be like them, it takes another commitment we are unwilling to give.

Our Baptism is our calling to become Holy. We are given the gift of the Holy Spirit to help us to know God's will and to do God's will. This is the life of being a saint. It is the life of holiness that we are all called to seek. Blessed are those who thirst for righteous, for they will be satisfied. Do we thirst for holiness?

Another way to think about how they became saints is living out the Beatitudes. Those declared blessed by Jesus in the Beatitudes from Matthew's

Gospel, are the those who walked closely with God. These are the hearts Jesus could see were open to Him and His words of Eternal Life. Living the Beatitudes is a life of true happiness. Happiness that lives within, loving God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength, and loving their neighbor. Knowing that this happiness which God gives is not the happiness of the world but is part of the joy that lasts forever.

Still we may think, we could never be a saint, because saints are perfect. At least that is what our statues and holy cards seem to represent. We know this is not true. Saints are sinners just like ourselves, but ones who kept humbling themselves before the Lord, receiving his mercy, and seeking the way of holiness.

The saints were not born saints; they became saints. They underwent a conversion – a change of heart which resulted in a change of life. This change did not happen overnight but was the result of a long and painful struggle for many of them. This change of heart is called conversion (which every saint underwent) and is very clearly seen in the lives of the GOATS in the church. Whichever saint may be the greatest of all time for you: Francis of Assisi, Augustine of Hippo, Paul of Tarsus, etc., at some point in their lives, heard the words of Jesus: Love God with all you heart, love your neighbor as yourself, or “Repent and believe the Good News.” And they did, just as God’s word directed them.

After reading the lives of the saints, we see what we could be if we are willing to take the risk of total surrender to the love God. It all starts with the realization that God loves me as I am. The saints were people who believed the Good News of God’s unconditional love, and who began to return his love, and found their lives changed, not overnight, but through a gradual process of growth.

In some cases, like Saint Peter, it took a long time. We all want something for nothing, quickly and without having to work for it; but it cannot be. If we work at becoming saints, then we are on the path to a tremendous joy and freedom. When we do the will of God, things have a wonderful way of working themselves out.

Saints teach us what we are capable of. All we need is the will to imitate them. Turning to them today, celebrating their lives and deaths, means that we acknowledge the paths they set before us and we are ready to follow them. Just as they did, entrusting their lives to God. Then we too are on the path of becoming a GOAT, for this is what being a Saint is all about. It all began at our Baptism. Be Holy as your God is Holy.