

All Saints

The Kansas City Royals lost last year's World Series in the bottom of the ninth of Game Seven with the tying run on third base. After the game the players were stunned. They stayed in the dugout for an hour and a half, still wearing their uniforms, trying to absorb what had just happened to them. They were determined to go back to the World Series the following year. Throughout this season the Royals held a commanding lead in their division. In late September they lost a large number of games, but they made it to the playoffs. They were nearly eliminated in Houston a few weeks ago, but late in the game, down by four runs in the eighth inning, they scored five and went on to win by three. Since then, the Royals have battled hard, and now they are in the World Series again, determined to win it all. This team has won fans throughout Kansas City, the country, and the entire world largely because when everyone thought they were down and out, they fought hard for their goal.

Not everyone plays professional baseball, but we all go through a time in our lives when we feel as though we're down by four runs in the eighth inning. A student who doesn't make good grades studies hard to pass a course. A college graduate who failed five job interviews goes for a sixth. A woman who declares she will never date again after her boyfriend cheated on her decides to trust another man. A cancer patient who hears the doctor say she will not live to see Christmas decides to prove him wrong. All around us are stories of inspiration. All around us are people who were knocked down but refused to give up. They reached inside themselves and found the strength they needed to make tomorrow a better day.

All Saints' Day originated as a day to honor the relics of martyrs. Our church grew because the first Christians suffered persecution. Many of them were beaten, tortured, separated from their families, and killed. They were ordinary people who possessed extraordinary faith. They are our heroes.

In the Book of Revelation John has a vision of a great multitude of saints: 144,000 people worshiping before the throne of God. Their foreheads are marked for Christ. They carry palm branches of victory. They wear white robes washed in the blood of the Lamb. They are martyrs. In the vision, one of the elders says, "These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress." They are the saints, countless in number, the saints to whom we look for inspiration.

During our lives we may go through a time of great distress. To overcome it requires great sacrifices. Tired parents who think they have no more energy still find strength to care for a sick child. Employees who would rather walk away from a difficult job stay there in order to serve their customers. And baseball players who feared their season was coming to an end concentrate their forces to win a championship. We may not become a professional athlete. We may not have to die for our faith. But we may each go through a time of great distress. One way to succeed is to think about other ordinary people who refused to give up. You have role models in your family and in our common history. In the church we also have a special group of men and women who have faced obstacles and survived. They intercede for us when we need God's help. They inspire us when we tell their stories. They are all saints.

Sunday, November 1, 2015