

All Saints Day

In mid-October Pope Francis canonized six new saints: two women who founded religious orders, two diocesan priests, a bishop and a pope. Very few people around here have heard of Saints Maria Katharina Kasper, Nazaria Ignacia de Santa Teresa de Jesús, Francesco Spinelli and Vincenzo Romano. But many people know about Saints Óscar Romero and Pope Paul VI. Pope Paul presided over most of the Second Vatican Council. Romero was killed out of hatred for the faith during the civil war in El Salvador. As archbishop of San Salvador, he defended the rights of the poor against an oppressive government. While the archbishop was celebrating mass in a hospital chapel, a gunman assassinated him during the words of consecration, the archbishop's blood mingling with the blood of Christ on the altar.

It is inspiring to have such examples of faithfulness. These are only the latest of thousands of saints recognized by the Catholic Church. Yet many people think that they themselves could never become a saint. They are mindful of their own sins, and they don't anticipate holding the lofty positions of foundress, archbishop or pope. Incidentally, if you are not mindful of your own sins, the people who live and work with you probably are. Even saints committed sins.

Perhaps as added encouragement, today's liturgy offers us Psalm 24 as our responsorial. It asks, "Who shall stand in [the Lord's] holy place?" It's a question similar to one we heard in Psalm 15 on a Sunday a couple of months ago. Psalm 24 gives three criteria for the person able to stand in the Lord's presence: "The clean of hands and pure of heart, whose soul is not set on vain things." These resemble the goals Jesus offers his disciples in the Beatitudes. Both these passages give us guidance. They are not meant to make you think that holiness is unattainable, but that it's something you can achieve in ordinary ways.

Psalm 24 expresses its ideas succinctly. It wants clean hands. Think about the ways that you have used your hands today. Have you placed them on a computer or a phone? Did your hands promote goodness or seek out sin? Have you used your hands to touch another person? Was it to comfort or to hurt? Psalm 24 wants a pure heart. Think about the ways you used your heart today. Did you want something good for people you saw at home or at school, in the office or on the road? Did your heart lead you to personal desires that will bring a lasting reward or only passing pleasures? Psalm 24 wants a soul free of vain things. Think about where you set your soul today. Did your soul long to fulfill another's need? Or did you seek the vanity of personal appearances?

If you're human, you've probably achieved both good and bad with your hands, heart and soul today. But the good you've done should awaken within you a sense of possibility. God knows what you can do, and God calls you to be even more than you already are. God calls you to be a saint.