

All Saints

During a funeral Mass, we pray for the repose of the person who died, and we pray for ourselves. The death of someone we know puts us in closer touch with our own mortality. The nearness of death fills some people with dread, but it gives believers hope. Here is one of the funeral prayers you may hear the priest say in reference to God's kingdom: "There we hope to enjoy for ever the fullness of your glory, when you will wipe away every tear from our eyes. For seeing you, our God, as you are, we shall be like you for all the ages and praise you without end."

That bold prayer is based on today's passage from the First Letter of John: "what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like [God], for we shall see him as he is."

The witness of the saints who have gone before us animates that hope. You may have your favorite saint: Francis of Assisi for his love for the earth; Joan of Arc for her courage in the face of battle; or Anthony of Padua, who seemingly finds objects that have been lost. You may also have inspirational people in your life whom you consider saints: a relative whose peacefulness brings you reassurance, a friend whose achievements enable you to enlarge your dreams, or a teacher who gave you skills that help you negotiate difficult days. People like these help us grow into the person God made us to be.

We may aspire to become someone like them, but the First Letter of John suggests we can become something more. When our day comes to see the face of God, we may fear it will be too much to endure, that we will not bear it because our imperfections will become so obvious. Well, St. John says in his letter today that after we see the face of God, "we shall be like him, [because] we shall see him as he is."

People may experience the presence of God through special events in their lives: the birth of a child, a walk along a beach, a rescue from what seemed certain death. Others may have seen some vision they believe can only be a manifestation of God. And when we gather for Mass, we have a profound sacramental encounter with Jesus Christ when we eat his Body and drink his Blood. He is with us through all our times of peace and trouble.

On All Saints day, we recall these experiences—the ones we've had and the ones in the lives of saints. Our celebration today provides reassurance that just as ordinary people like us have attained great holiness, so may we. God has a plan in mind, a plan for peace and tranquility. He invites us to behold his face.

On that day, we shall not only be like the saints; we shall be like God, for we shall see him as he is.