

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
SOLEMNITY OF ALL SAINTS
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My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy Father's representative to the United States, I wish to express the spiritual closeness and paternal affection of Pope Francis to all of you gathered here, as well as to those watching on television, courtesy of the Eternal Word Television Network, and to those listening on the radio or through the internet.

Today, we are celebrating the Solemnity of All Saints. As I have pointed out in the past, in this Basilica, there are many reminders of the universal call to holiness – from the relief at the back of the basilica to the saints depicted in the Trinity Dome. The Second Vatican Council placed the universal call to holiness before our eyes with these words:

“The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one – that sanctity which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father and worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. These people follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ in order to be worth of being sharers in His glory. Every person must walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity.” (Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 41)

That same Council proposed the Virgin Mary as the model of discipleship and holiness. She is the one who is without stain or blemish – the model of the Church in her perfection. Of her the *Catechism* says:

“Mary benefitted first of all and uniquely from Christ's victory over sin: *she was preserved from all stain of original sin and by a special grace of God committed no sin of any kind during her whole earthly life.*” (CCC, 411)

It is fitting then, as we renew our own commitment to holiness, that we gather in this Basilica, dedicated to honor the Immaculate Virgin. In his recent exhortation *Christus vivit*, Pope Francis reflected not only on the young Christ but on the young Mary, “whose heart overflowed with joy, whose eyes, reflecting the light of the Holy Spirit, looked at life with faith and treasured all things in her youthful heart. She was energetic ... She did not think about her own plans but went ‘with haste’ to the hill country” (cf. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, 25 March 2019, 46) to minister to Elizabeth.

Mary's youthful heart and her openness to God's plan show us the path to holiness. Holiness is not rooted in our efforts but in our openness of heart to the thrice-holy God who can live and be at work within us. The temptation today, particularly in the United States, is to push and push, as if to conquer something or someone, by our own efforts. The saints show us a different path, as Blessed Marie-Eugene of the Child Jesus teaches:

“We so easily confuse holiness with heroism. We would like to be heroes and to assure the success of our physical or intellectual powers or in either case the success of our human, natural powers. In battle, the hero is the one who conquers; the saint is the one who lets God conquer in him. This is the difference. We are holy when God does all within us; we are only perfect children when God guides and enlightens us, when we give him a perfectly free hand.” (Blessed Marie-Eugene of L’Enfant Jesus, *Under the Torrents of His Love*, New York, Alba House, 1995: 47.)

If we can speak of the saints as heroes, it is not because of their strength. The heroic virtues of the saints – their charity, their service, their sacrifice – were the responses of people who understood themselves to be weak and childlike. They were children who responded to the love they first received from the Father. They saw, with childlike innocence, the face of Christ in their brothers and sisters, and they loved Him to the end. Pascal said: “*Trust witnesses who are willing to sacrifice their lives.*”

It seems to me that the Church, burdened by scandal, lack of enthusiasm, empty pews, and even financial uncertainty, at times feels tired and old. Perhaps, the greatest crisis is the waning of faith. How far we are from the trusting faith of Mary. In fact, if we are to reignite faith, then it will be not through force or even right teaching; rather, it will be through attraction, through the heroic generosity or childlike goodness of another.

For that reason, in his exhortation *Christus vivit* (nn. 49-63), Pope Francis offered the whole Church examples of young saints who devoted themselves to Christ and to following the path of holiness, noting that “through the holiness of the young, the Church can renew her spiritual ardor and her apostolic vigor. The balm of holiness generated by the good lives of so many young people can heal the wounds of the Church and the world, bringing us back to that fullness of love to which we have always been called: young saints inspire us to return to our first love.” (CV, 50)

Offering the examples of Saint Sebastian, Francis of Assisi, Joan of Arc, Kateri Tekakwitha, Dominic Savio and the Little Flower, as well as lesser known saints and blessed, including Pier Giorgio Frassati, Marcel Callo, and Chiara Badano, and even those from missionary regions like Vietnam, Argentina, and Congo, the Holy Father reminds the whole Church that holiness is possible – even among the young. Often this holiness is hidden and lived in silence, but it is there, and this cloud of witnesses encourages us and intercedes for us.

We are called to live this holiness by surrendering to God. The saints are models for us, but we cannot be them. God has called us – each by name – to serve Him, each in our own way; thus, we would do well, in openness of heart to the promptings of the Spirit, to take the advice of Saint Francis de Sales, who says: “Be who you are and be that well in honor of the Master Craftsman whose handiwork you are.”

Be who you are and be that well, glorifying the Lord by your life!