

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
SOLEMNITY OF ALL SAINTS
BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
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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. Each time I celebrate Mass in this basilica, I gaze at the relief at the back of the basilica and am reminded of the universal call to holiness. Sixty years ago, the Fathers of 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 addition to her, we have the saints depicted in the Trinity Dome who remind us of the holiness of our predecessors in faith in this country. Holiness is possible for all of us.

The saints are those men and women who took Christ's teaching, especially in His Sermon on the Mount, to heart. Jesus' great “teaching moment” began with the Beatitudes, which we heard in the Gospel. This is the essential spirituality of the Christian disciple. One immediately hears the contrast between worldly values and attitudes and those expected of believers.

If we were to live simply according to the laws of nature, or “according to the flesh” as Saint Paul might put it, we would follow a Darwinian path of “survival of the fittest” and might be aggressive in trying

to “out compete” our brothers and sisters. We would view them as a threat and become aggressive, trying to conquer them.

The temptation today, particularly in the United States, is to push and push, as if to conquer something or someone. 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. In our Second Reading, St. John reminds us that “we are God’s children now,” because of the love the Father has bestowed on us.

The saints saw, with childlike innocence, the face of Christ in their brothers and sisters, and they loved Him. Jean-Paul Sartre said, “Hell is other people,” but today we celebrate the “communion of saints” – the great cloud of witnesses, who not only inspire us but who also pray for us and who assist with their prayers, as they eagerly wait for us to join them. The saints give us witness to a life lived in humble service of God and neighbor, and Pascal invites us to “*Trust witnesses who are willing to sacrifice their lives.*”

A recent survey about priests and bishops showed that there is a growing lack of trust in the Church. How far we are from the trusting faith of Mary and the saints! In fact, if we are to reignite faith, then it will be not through force or might, and not even through right teaching, as necessary as that might be; rather, it will be through attraction, through the heroic generosity or childlike goodness of another.

Some years ago, following the Synod on Youth, 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.” (Apostolic Exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, 50)

During this Eucharistic Revival year, I place before you the example of Blessed Carlo Acutis, whose relics are traveling around the country. He said some beautiful things:

- To be always united to Jesus is my program of life.
- Every minute that passes is one minute less to become like God.
- The Eucharist is my highway to heaven.
- The more Eucharist we receive the more we become like Jesus.
- The Virgin Mary is the only woman in my life.

My Dear Friends, the Beatitudes which embody the spirituality of holiness, help us to be simple and childlike, not aggressive. We are called to live this holiness by surrendering to God. May each of us learn from the advice of the little and childlike. May we heed the words of Jesus who came down from heaven and became a child so that we might go up to heaven and enjoy the vision of God forever.