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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Happy All Saints Day!

What is a saint? Much could be said in answer to this question, but one thing is true of all the saints: they have very strong desires. Psalm 24 expresses this truth when it says of God’s holy people: “Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face.”¹ It is like St. Augustine said:

“The entire life of a good Christian is in fact an exercise of holy desire. You do not yet see what you long for, but the very act of desiring prepares you, so that when he comes you may see and be utterly satisfied.”²

This is also what Jesus expresses in the Beatitudes, when he says: “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.”³ The saints – those whom we call “holy” – are women and men who were filled with desire. Ultimately, their desires, which God created and placed within them, became completely united with the desires of God. This is the prayer of Psalm 20: “May he give you your heart’s desire and fulfill every one of your plans.”⁴

Desires are rooted in what we call the “heart”. When we speak of the heart, we do not mean only the physical organ, but we refer also to that spiritual “place” within us where affection and emotion come together with our thoughts and our will. Becoming a saint, being holy, involves allowing our hearts to become more and more united with the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is there, in that Sacred Heart, that the

¹ Cf. *Psalm* 24:6, Responsorial Psalm for the Solemnity of All Saints.

² St. Augustine of Hippo, Homily on the First Epistle of John, 6.

³ *Matthew* 5:6, Gospel reading for the Solemnity of All Saints.

⁴ *Psalm* 20:5 (Grail Psalter).

human and divine love of Christ burns for each one of us. It is there, in the heart of Christ, where he *thinks* of us, he *wills* our good, he has deep *affection* for us, and he *loves* us with a love of desire. His desire for us has the power, if we allow it, to purify and transform our hearts into a burning furnace of love for him. And to love God – with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength – while loving our neighbor as ourselves: this is what it means to be a saint. When this happens, the two hearts – our heart and his – become one.

Last week, Pope Francis released a new encyclical letter on the Sacred Heart of Jesus, called *Dilexit nos*, meaning “He loved us”.⁵ The Pope reminds us that, in our relationship with God, God’s love for us came first.⁶ He loved us into existence. He loved us before we loved him. And nothing can separate us from that love.⁷

In writing this encyclical on the Sacred Heart, the Pope begins by speaking about the human heart that is at the center of each and every one of us. He says that, in our day, we need to re-discover the heart. He points out that we live in an age of consumerism and frenetic activity, bombarded by technology and sensory stimulation. Because of this, it is easy to find ourselves engaging reality only at a superficial level. But when we do this, we forget the deeper meaning of things. We lose touch with the “heart”. When we probe the deeper questions – *Who am I? To whom do I belong?* and *What is the connection that I share with every other person?* – we find ourselves returning to the heart: to that place deep within ourselves, where there is a desire and a longing for something greater than what we can provide for ourselves.⁸ In the heart, we connect with God. And from the heart, we connect with our fellow human beings.

For the Christian, the heart is the place where God wants to dwell. In this way, our inmost desires, dreams, thoughts, and aspirations can enter into relationship with God and be influenced by him, whose own heart is desirous of our love and

⁵ Cf. *Romans* 8:37.

⁶ Cf. *1 John* 4:10.

⁷ Cf. *Romans* 8:39.

⁸ Cf. Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit Nos* On the Human and Divine Love of the Heart of Jesus Christ, 24 October 2024, 8-9.

wants us to reach for the greatest dream of all, which is a life of superabundance in his grace and glory: the life of a saint.

Saints are not some kind of “super-humans”, as if belonging to a higher rank of creation than the rest of us. Saints are men and women with a human nature, and with human hearts like our own. They dream of great things, but they also experience frustrating weaknesses: fears, worries, doubts; weaknesses of will; and yes, sin. But the saints are people who, ultimately, welcome God’s indwelling in their hearts, and who progressively allow God to become the *Lord* of their hearts. God does not take away their own true hearts; far from it. In fact, he uses the uniqueness of the heart of each saint to glorify him in a particular way. God loves to relate to each of us in a unique way according to our individual identity, just as you and I enjoy having different kinds of relationships with people who have different personalities. What happens as someone grows in relationship with God is that they and God enter into a deep communion of persons, such that the person lives “in God” and God lives in them. Saint Paul speaks of this experience when he says: “yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me”.⁹ The saints are people who have yielded so much to God’s love and power living in them, that God is able to do great things through their humanity.

On this feast of All Saints, we should remember that sainthood is possible for all of us. Indeed, not only is it *possible*; it is the call of every one of us. Canonization is not necessarily the point. The Church canonizes saints not for *their* benefit, but for the inspiration of *us* who remain behind. Whether or not your saintly life makes you famous, you *do* have a place that God has prepared for you in heaven. To arrive there entails living the particular life of holiness that God has prepared for you in this life. To live that life, the key is to discover what is truly in your heart, and to allow your heart to become united with the heart of God.

⁹ *Galatians* 2:20.