

HOMILY OF ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE, APOSTOLIC NUNCIO
SOLEMNITY OF ALL SAINTS, NOVEMBER 1, 2017
BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
WASHINGTON, DC

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.

As we gather in this basilica, there are many reminders of the call to holiness. The beautiful relief at the back of this basilica of the universal call to holiness shows us that sanctity is not for the privileged few but for all of us. Indeed, the images of the canonized saints, scattered throughout the basilica in stone, glass, and mosaic recall the men and women who dedicated themselves completely to the service of God and neighbor. They are an example for us never to give up, despite occasional setbacks and human frailty, in striving for the things of heaven.

In a little over a month, the Trinity Dome will be dedicated in this great basilica, and the images of saints, especially those from this country, will be illuminated, reflecting the words of Revelation of a *great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue*, gathered in adoration and praise of the Blessed Trinity and chanting: "*Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving, honor power, and might be to our God, forever and ever. Amen.*" (Rev. 7:12)

It seems that holiness is more necessary now than ever. Reflecting on the events since this feast last year, one notices a restlessness among the people of this nation. Those events include: the conclusion of a contentious election cycle; endless protests; continuing disagreement about the detention of migrants and refugees; racial violence; senseless shootings; and, an expanding opioid epidemic. Globally too, there is tension in Korea; destruction in Syria; instability in Venezuela; and a dehumanizing refugee crisis. Our world needs saints now more than ever.

The world might say that we need heroes. It is true that saints are recognized for their heroic virtues, but heroism should not be confused with holiness. Worldly heroism suggests being successful in view of our human, natural powers, including our physical strength or our intellectual powers. In battle, the hero conquers, but the saint allows himself or herself to be conquered by God. There is a difference.

Last year, the Holy Father said that the saints "*struggle to the very end, with all their strength, and they triumph, but not by their own efforts: the Lord triumphs in them and with them.*" (Homily for the Canonization of Seven Saints, 16 October 2016) We are holy when God is at work entirely within us. We are perfect children when God guides us and enlightens us, when we allow Him to lead us by the hand. We are true children when we surrender to the love of the Father and try to be pleasing in His sight. A saint is one who recognizes his status (and dignity) as a child of God.

The saints deeply desired to enter the Kingdom, but they realized they could only do so by becoming like little children (cf. Mt 18:3) – small and humble, weak and trusting, receptive and docile, pleasing to the heavenly Father. In our second reading, John reminds us: *See what love*

the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. (1 John 3:1)

The heroic virtues of the saints – their charity, their service, their sacrifice – were the responses of children 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.”*

We should heed his advice. Seldom can we convince someone of the truth of faith by persuasive argument alone. Faith in God, so necessary for peace, is usually ignited by an attraction, usually through the heroic generosity or childlike goodness of another. There is something that must attract the weary soul so that it stands before the mystery of Christ. That “something” may be someone like you, living your faith in ordinary ways as a child of God, moved by God’s love.

The saints should remain before our eyes, not only as an example to be imitated, but also to keep alive in our hearts the desire for God and heaven. Perhaps, we think that we cannot be like them – that we are sinners in a world of sinners. Here applying the words of the French author, Georges Bernanos, first to ourselves and then to others, can be helpful:

“All too late, experience has taught me that we should not evaluate people by their vices but, on the contrary, by what they have kept intact and pure, by what there is still left in them of childhood, however deep down we have to search for it.”

Can we find the childlike goodness in each person, even in ourselves, and build on that? Doing so demands an examination of conscience. Even when we have made a commitment to God and faithfully carry out our duties, at a certain point, in the struggle to rediscover that childlike purity of heart, we realize that we have not fully offered ourselves to God. The dispositions of the Beatitudes – poverty of spirit, meekness, purity of heart, the hunger and thirst for righteousness – are not fully there. This represents – and this feast represents – an opportunity for a deeper conversion to God – a truly personal and profound act of self-offering before God.

Holiness requires being conquered by God, and this means letting go of ourselves and entrusting ourselves like children to the Father. This surrender means saying Yes to God entirely. The saints inspire us, awakening the desire to be a child loved by the Father – the desire to surrender everything to God. This is the deeper commitment of the saints.

At one point in the Gospel of John, Jesus asks His disciples, “Will you lay down your life for me?” (John 13:38) The saints were willing to answer this with a whole-hearted Yes, even when this meant intense suffering. The road to holiness is not easy, but it is worth it. The Gospel of this Feast concludes: *“Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad for your reward will be great in heaven.”* (Matthew 5:12)

If you want this reward, then surrender to God. Let us beseech the saints and the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of All Saints, to intercede for us before the face of the Father, that He might bestow upon us the grace to surrender so that we might be noble children of a loving Father.