

ZE07103109 - 2007-10-31

Permalink: <http://www.zenit.org/article-20889?l=english>

Who Are the Saints?

Gospel Commentary for the Feast of All Saints' Day

By Father Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap

ROME, OCT. 31, 2007 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- For some time now, scientists have been sending signals into the cosmos, hoping for a response from some intelligent being on some lost planet. The Church has always maintained a dialogue with the inhabitants of another world -- the saints. That is what we proclaim when we say, "I believe in the communion of the saints." Even if inhabitants outside of the solar system existed, communication with them would be impossible, because between the question and the answer, millions of years would pass. Here, though, the answer is immediate because there is a common center of communication and encounter, and that is the risen Christ.

Perhaps in part because of the time of the year in which it falls, the feast of All Saints' Day has something special that explains its popularity and the many traditions linked to it in some sectors of Christianity. The motive is what John says in the second reading. In this life, "we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed." We are like the embryo in the womb of a mother yearning to be born. The saints have been "born" (the liturgy refers to the day of death as "the day of birth," "dies natalis.") To contemplate the saints is to contemplate our destiny. All around us, nature strips itself and the leaves fall, but meanwhile, the feast of the saints invites us to gaze on high; it reminds us that we are not destined to wither on this earth forever, like the leaves.

The Gospel reading is the beatitudes. One in particular inspires the selection of this passage: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, they shall be satisfied." The saints are those who have hungered and thirsted for justice, that is, in biblical language, for sanctity. They have not resigned themselves to mediocrity; they have not been content with half-measures.

The first reading of the feast helps us to understand who the saints are. They are "those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb." Sanctity is received from Christ; it is not our own production. In the Old Testament, to be a saint meant "to be separated" from all that is impure; in the Christian understanding, it is, rather, the opposite, that is, to "be united" to Christ.

The saints, that is, the saved, are not only those mentioned in the calendar or the book of the saints. The "unknown saints" also exist: those who risked their lives for their brothers, the martyrs of justice and liberty, or of duty, the "lay saints," as someone has called them. Without knowing it, their robes have also been washed in the blood of the Lamb, if they have lived according to their consciences and if they have been concerned with the good of their brothers.

A question spontaneously arises: What do the saints do in heaven? The answer is, also here, in the first reading: The saved adore, they prostrate themselves before the throne, exclaiming, "Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving ..." The true human vocation is fulfilled in them, that of being "praise to the glory of God" (Ephesians 1:14). Their choir is directed by Mary, who continues her hymn of praise in heaven, "My

ZENIT

soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord." It is in this praise that the saints find their happiness and joy. "My spirit rejoices in God." A man is who he loves and who he admires. Loving and praising God, we identify ourselves with God, participate in his glory and in his own happiness.

One day, a saint, St. Symeon the New Theologian, had a mystical experience of God that was so strong he exclaimed to himself, "If paradise is no more than this, it is enough for me." But the voice of Christ told him, "You are very poor if you content yourself with this. The joy you have experienced in comparison to paradise is like the sky painted on paper in comparison to the real sky."

[Translation by ZENIT]

* * *

Father Raniero Cantalamessa is the Pontifical Household preacher. The readings for the feast of All Saints are Revelation 7:2-4,9-14; 1 John 3:1-3; Mathew 5:1-12a.

| [More](#)

© Innovative Media, Inc.

Reprinting ZENIT's articles requires written permission from the [editor](#).