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For some it may sound a little strange to hear that St. Paul has written, *be followers of me*, after all we are so used to hearing *be followers of Jesus*. And elsewhere St. Paul has written, *Imitate me as I imitate Christ*. For even an Apostle and Saint, for someone who is not just in the Bible but the author of several Epistles of the Bible, at first glance these statements may seem to be written by a man full of arrogance and pride and who wants to draw men to himself and not Jesus Christ. This is, at least for some modern commentators, what certain readers think. But St. Paul is not saying, *be followers of me*, or *imitate me as I imitate Christ*, because *I am so wonderful at it*, but hold us up himself up an example of how to fight for the Christian life. He also writes to *mark those who also walk*. We should pay attention to those who fought the good fight of faith, who led holy lives, so that we will not have only commandments, beatitudes, and parables to lead us to Heaven, but Jesus and His friends, the living and breathing examples we find through the Saints of God. To be sure, we need the facts of our faith and the Doctrine and Discipline of the Christian Church. But we also need examples, role models, and heroes. We need those in whom Jesus Christ came alive, was made flesh, and in whom the Gospel of the Good News of Salvation was alive and passed down through history.

This week we have celebrated the Octave of All Saints, a major feast day in the Church's calendar, the themes of which echo the themes of this Sunday. All

Saints provides us with the themes of holiness and of having our minds fixed on heaven, and next Sunday's theme of final deliverance, fittingly draw this long Trinity season to its close. The thought and teaching of this whole season of the Church year is "holiness" and our growth in holiness which is the distinguishing mark of a Christian. By His Grace, God has welcomes us into his Holy Catholic Church. He calls us to be *crucified to the world*. We are taught throughout this season that we do not grow in holiness through a determined effort of our own strength and will, but rather like procuring our wedding garments and putting on the armor of God, we are completely and totally surrender and submit to God's Holiness and the operations of His Grace. To grow in holiness, we submit our will to His will, rely on His grace, and discover his strength in our weakness. And lest we find our journey lonely and without any reference to others who have struggled to do the same, we believe in the Communion of Saints. The Communion of Saints is full of all men and women, down through history, who have surrendered and submitted to God the Father, through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. In the Communion of the Saints we find human beings like ourselves who struggled, fought, and overcame sin and who then were made new by the All-Righteousness of God. The Lord has raised up Saints with His intention and promise to come alive in all men and to give us patterns and models of how to grow in holiness. God has

called Saints from every station of life, every occupation, and every nationality to show us how to live and die so that we may reach the Kingdom of Heaven.

St. Paul writes, *be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample*. Then he writes to tell us what the Saints of God are not. He says that the Saints are not those *whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things*. Instead, the Saints of God have their minds and their hearts focused on Heaven and on Jesus Christ. *For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ*. Today, the Epistle and Gospel teach us that our true home is not on earth but in Heaven. We are exiles here, refugees waiting to be delivered to our native country where we will discover who we truly are. As St. Augustine said, *Our hearts, O Lord, are restless, until they may find their rest in you*. St. Paul makes it clear that *Heaven* is not just something in the distant future which has no bearing on us, but that Heaven is our true homeland and that our citizenship is mostly there and not here. No one understands this better than St. Paul, who writes this Epistle to the Philippians from a prison cell. When condemned by the Pharisees, St. Paul had appealed to the Roman Emperor as a Roman Citizen for proof and evidence of his crimes. He did not place his trust in Caesar, and yet he was determined to use his citizenship to show how shakey citizenship in the Roman Empire, or any earthly empire for that matter, really is. St. Paul's King was Jesus Christ. But St. Paul wanted

to show us all if the Roman Empire, with all of its claims to reason, logic, and human excellence, could come up with a case against him. Human empires and earthly justice don't usually end up being very convincing or even very plausible. Jesus Christ's crucifixion showed that and so would St. Paul's eventual execution. Even while in prison and under house arrest, St. Paul continued to minister and tend the Church of Christ because he was first and foremost a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven, whose logic is pure, whose reason is strong, and whose excellence is unmatched.

We are called to be *heavenly-minded*, to be citizens of heaven and to work tirelessly for the Kingdom of Heaven. But the Gospel reminds us that our citizenship in Heaven is related to our citizenship on earth. We hear Jesus say that we must *render therefore to Caesar the things do unto Caesar*, that we have a duty to the world and community in which we live, and to the powers by which our world is governed. Likewise, it is with God. God demands the return of everything we are to him, for we ourselves are his. God alone as our refuge and strength and the author of all godliness. This urges us to remember that earthly concerns and matters can have no final satisfaction for us. For our ultimate satisfaction is in Heaven.

We pray this morning that God will hear the devout prayers of his Church and that he would grant us those things that are in accordance with his will for us. But how do we come to know for what we ought to ask and where do we learn to

pray devoutly and ask faithfully? The more we grow in holiness, the greater the knowledge we shall have of God's will for us as we learn to submit our will cheerfully to his will for our lives. We look to our Lord Jesus Christ, to St. Paul, and to all the great Saints for living examples of that obedience. Amen.