

[Readings: Rev. 7:2-4, 9-14; Psalm 24; 1 John 3:1-3; Matt 5:1-12a]

What does it take to be a saint in this world? Two miracles and a lot of good press? Martyrdom for the right cause? Canonization can be achieved on these terms, but it takes a bit more to be actually counted among the blessed. Scripture goes on at length about the holy ones, but their identification always seems to boil down to a curious factor rarely considered: ***the condition of the human heart***. While we might look only to the "outer" criteria for sainthood -- the lame casting crutches aside, the cancer patient cured through timely intercession, or the firing squad shouting, "Recant your faith or die!" -- the biblical criterion is simpler: ***Live with a clean heart before God***. That opens up a new avenue of discernment. What makes for a clean heart?

Many of us grew up with the stain-of-sin metaphor impressed on us. If sin leaves a stain, then a clean heart is one free from sin. Fair enough. This idea, though, can paralyze us, because none of us is free from sin for more than minutes at a time -- unless you're a far better person than I. In my last two parishes, the parish secretary and I had a contest after I got back from my Confession to see how long I would stay in a "state of grace." I won't tell you how short or how long those times were, but it is humbling! If sainthood means being clean-hearted, and cleanliness equals sinlessness, knowledge of our sinfulness can demoralize us en route to sainthood. We're obliged to take the nearest exit and abandon that destination. We might give up the fight.

In the Bible, however, the clean heart is characterized as pure or focused. That points toward purity of intention more than action: recognizing that the horse needs to be in front of the cart or we're not going to get far. The clean-hearted don't aim at keeping their hands or even their noses clean, primarily. They have bigger fish to fry than managing exterior conditions, because they know exterior conditions inevitably result from interior ones. So the pure of heart focus on orienting themselves toward God: in prayer, in love, in purpose, linking themselves hour by hour with the will of God.

The habit of turning in a godly direction becomes their primary goal, not collecting good deeds like gold stars in the cause of righteousness.

All too often in the Bible we see what becomes of those who are righteous in deed but loveless in heart. Their offering before God remains inert and their hearts may fall more deeply into shadow, deprived of divine light. But those who move in the direction of God are deepening their relationship to the source of love, light, and life quite naturally. Only those who grow close enough to God to know themselves as God's children will embrace this identity effortlessly. This purity is within reach of us all.

Catholic citizens of the United States have the providential gift of celebrating the feast of All Saints on the Sunday before the 2020 presidential election. This campaign has once more manifested the divided nature of the American people. The possibility of post-election violence, even by a few, is a real threat within our cities. Even if such hostility does not unfold, there remains the violence of an interior and simmering hatred of the neighbor who is not like us. In a kind of anti-liturgy, this hidden violence causes us to think to ourselves, "It is their fault, their fault their most grievous fault." And somehow, some way, they must pay either through cold indifference or through violence expulsion from the human community. Into this fracas of hatred, injustice and the impossibility of forgiveness, comes the feast of All Saints.

We have overly-romanticized this feast. It is generally the day in which some children dress up as their favorite saint, imitating the virtues of their saintly forebears. The roots of this feast contradict this romanticization. The feast of All Saints originated as a devotion to relics in the city of Rome. The bodies of the saints, especially the martyrs, were venerated on this day.

In Catholicism, sainthood and martyrdom are inextricably linked. After all, in the Book of Revelation, who is the saint? It is the great multitude, standing beneath the altar of the Lamb once slain. This great multitude represents all the martyrs, those who have borne witness to the Lamb once slain even unto their own death. The great multitude does not perform an anti-liturgy of blame. No!

The great multitude does homage before the Lamb once slain, bending their knees before the living God. There is no hostility within this liturgical City of Saints. They act as one body, praising the living God.

What hope is there for us -- those of us trudging in this valley of tears and death -- to experience this saintly existence of love, unity and homage before God alone?

The Beatitudes, in the Gospel of Matthew, are the Constitution for this City of Saints. Who are the blessed, the citizens of heaven? The poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the clean of heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted and the insulted.

It is not those with power and prestige who have prominence in the City of God. Might does not make right, power politics do not conquer. It is those who lack, who are empty before God and neighbor, who are the blessed.

Whatever happens on Nov. 3, the politics of the saints may be exercised. The great lie of the earthly city is that the only politics that matter unfolds in the halls of power in Washington, D.C. Although we do have the power to vote for life, to vote for marriage, to vote for religious freedom in our country.

But politics is about the communion of the city, the cultivating of friendship between men and women, young adults and youth in day-to-day life.

We, Catholics, must practice this saintly politics, especially now. We must be poor like Christ, mourn with those who mourn, not seek our own will at every cost, remember those who are forgotten, forgive those who offend, recognize our poverty before God, make peace, and be willing to suffer for doing all of this.

Everything that we do, every decision we make, every thought we have, must be infused with this Beatific Constitution.

On Nov. 3, and well after, let us witness to the politics of the saints, of the martyrs who spilled their blood for the love of the Lamb once slain.

All holy men and women, all holy young people and children, pray for us, especially now. AMEN! *(Taken from a meditation by Timothy P. O'Malley, Ph.D.)*