

A.M.D.G.

Homily for All Saints Day Mass 2022, year C

“These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb.”

A study came out recently that found that 50% of young Americans sometimes or always feel alone. Another study concluded that your generation is the loneliest generation ever studied. Many young people feel disconnected, isolated. They feel that no one really knows them or cares about them. Apparently social media only makes this worse. It seems that there is a law of inverse proportion: the more connected one is the less real connection one has with others. I think that human beings seem to be the only animals that can feel alone even when surrounded by people. We feel alone because no one knows who we are behind their social mask or hidden in their screen. It is particularly sad to hear Christians speaking about their loneliness, because the Christian life is the antithesis of loneliness. It is fervent and extensive interpersonal connection. The solemnity that we proclaim today is truly Good News for the lonely, for we celebrate the solemnity of all Saints. We celebrate the communion that we have with all of the saints in heaven. What does that mean? It means that from our baptism onwards we have been welded like iron to the holy ones of God. We are in communion with them. We participate in their glory, and they share in our struggle here on earth. That is incredible, and so very encouraging. But how can this be? How can we understand such a mystery.

How many of you play a team sport? How many have been part of a team competition? There is that old cliché, ‘there is no I in team,’ but it is getting at an important truth. Once you step out on the field with your team, it does not matter how well each player performs separately from the rest. Only the team wins or loses. Great individual performances, however important, are never enough to win a game. It takes the whole team together, everyone playing their part, to secure the victory. That is why a truly unified team will more often than not beat a group of talented individuals. I remember in my senior year in high school we defeated one of the top ranked teams in the country in rugby, a team that had better players, including several who became professionals, because we were one. When a team is united the talents and efforts of each player are shared with the rest and the sum becomes greater than the parts. Mac’s strength, Nick’s speed, Andi’s kicking, Al’s determination, I participated in all of that, as if all of the talents and

efforts were just parts of one organism, one animal, And the collective strength had a power beyond each individual.

The communion of saints is a spiritual team. Did you know that you are part of a team of the strongest, most incredibly talented and heroic human beings who have ever lived? You share in St. Isaac Jogue's courage in the face of violence, St. Edmund Campion's learning and eloquence, St. Paul Miki's zeal for the Gospel, and Blessed Miguel Pro's joy in persecution! We Catholics put images of the saints in our schools and homes to remind us of who we are surrounded by, that *we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses*. We are not alone! We are not unknown! These are the lies that our sick culture tells us to drag us down and make us forget the communion in which we participate, and the greatness to which we are called. Just like a sports team, the more we lean into our teammates and commit to the unity, the more support we receive and the more power in unity we participate in. Imagine if we were to lean into our heavenly team more, and instead of messaging or ticktocking we prayed to the saints and read about their lives? Every time I read about the saints and pray for their intercession, I draw strength from them. When I am surrounded by enemies, I take courage from remembering St Isaac Jogues imprisoned in the Iroquois village. When I cannot find the words to communicate the faith, I draw inspiration from St. Edmund Campion's eloquence. When I lack love for my neighbor, I strive to imitate Mother Teresa's missionary charity. They are all with me when I lean on them. And they are with you. So, never believe that you are alone. Never accept that you are isolated and in the darkness. You are on the heavenly team! You share in the light of the brightest souls of human history!! You participate in the communion of saints! Let us rejoice in that today and every day.

There is a saint who showed me what it really means to be part of the communion of saints, who demonstrated how to lean on the heavenly team for support. It was St. Francis Xavier, who in a letter to St. Ignatius described the terror of being in a horrific storm at sea, tossed to and fro on a ship in the midst of the immense ways. He feared for his life, and saw the sailors around him give up hope of surviving and abandoning their duties. He had no recourse to anyone else for help except the saints. His words teach us the essence of the beauty of the communion of saints that we celebrate today:

“Nor did I have neglect to have recourse to all saints in the glory of Paradise, beginning with those who here below were of the holy Company of Jesus, especially the blessed soul of Father Favre. I could never convey to you the consolation I received from thus commending myself to God our Lord through the intercession of my brethren of the Society, living and dead. While the danger lasted, I also put myself in the hands of the angels, praying to them choir by choir, and under the protection of the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, evangelists, martyrs, confessors, virgins – all the saints in Heaven – and to strengthen my hope of obtaining pardon from my infinite number of sins, I took my protectress the glorious Virgin, our Lady, because in Heaven everything she asks of God our Lord is granted. Finally, I put all my trust in the infinite merits of the Passion and death of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Lord. With all this protection and help about me, I think I felt happier in the thick of the storm than afterwards when delivered from it.”

We are part of a heavenly team, and protected and strengthened by the saints in heaven, we should, as St. Francis Xavier did, feel happy even in the thick of the storm.

The saintly mentality. The sinner says, ‘Forget about Christ. I will live my own life.’ The saint says, ‘Forget about my own life, I will live for Christ.’ The sinner says, ‘I cannot be great. The sinner says, ‘I am too weak to fight temptation.’ The saint says, ‘When I am weak, then I am strong, for then I must rely on the power of Christ in me.’