

Bishop Bradley's Reflections on the Sunday Readings

November 1, 2015 Solemnity of All Saints

9:30 a.m. Holy Family Chapel---Nazareth

This is truly a great feast-----one of my favorites! It's our feast! It is a Holy Day we can all relate to! We are celebrating our ancestors----our family members---your community members. It is a very human feast Day----and the one that reminds us about what is really important----about the reality of our lives in this world: that this is only a dress rehearsal for the *"final act."*

Today's First Reading from the Book of Revelation focuses our attention on the universality of humanity!...*"those marked with the seal of the Lamb"--- 144,000 from every race of the tribe of Israel."* But, even more does the reference to the *"great multitude from every nation, race, people and tongue, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands.....crying out: 'Salvation comes from our God, Who is seated on the throne and from the Lamb,'" help us to realize that God calls all people to holiness and to salvation. "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."*

It is also interesting that in one of the first lines of that Reading, we heard St. John say: *"Do not damage the land or the sea or the trees...."* That is very consistent with our Holy Father's recent Encyclical "Laudato Si" which calls us to be mindful of the environment and to lovingly care for Mother Earth which has been entrusted into our stewardship to be treated responsibly and with care for future generations.

Today we, the Church here on earth, look to those huge multitudes of our brothers and sisters who have survived and been victorious during their time here on earth as they live gloriously with God in Heaven; we rejoice for them, even as they cheer us on from their Heavenly vantage point.

Today's Psalm Response carries that same theme of rejoicing through: *"Lord, this is the People who long to see Your Face!"*---

As you might remember from today's Office of Readings, St. Bernard in today's Second Reading reflected on that sense of "longing" when he wrote: *"Calling the saints to mind inspires, or rather arouses in us, above all else, a longing to enjoy*

their company....Let us (then) long for those who are longing for us, hasten to those who are waiting for us, and ask those who look for our coming to intercede for us."

We know that from the day of our baptism, throughout our journey of faith in this world, we are being called to "grow in holiness"----we are called to "become saints."

For some people, they might think that is next to impossible. Many people think that only extraordinary people can be holy. The popular/well-known saints and martyrs would fit into that description: St. Paul, St. Peter, the Apostles, St. Francis of Assisi, Blessed Mother Teresa, and most recently, St. Junipero Serra.

I'm sure you know that when people think about you, dear Sisters, or when they think about monks in monasteries, and priests (and possibly even bishops), they look at us and think that it's easy for us to be holy---that the reason we became sisters, monks, priests is because for us it is no problem. Some people actually think that all you do here in the convent all day is glide around in cloistered gardens and spend all day reading from your prayer books. But, as you and I both know, that is not the way things are---nor is that what holiness means.

I love what Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI wrote when he said: "To become saints means to fulfill completely what we already are." In other words, as we grow in holiness---as we try each day to live our lives more consistently according to the way Jesus has shown us, and taught us, how to live---we become a bit more like what God dreamed we could be when He made us. When we live up to our potential for goodness, justice and love that God has placed within us, then we are living truly holy lives.

The only way we can do that is by coming to know, love and follow Jesus! We can only grow in holiness through our relationship with Christ, our Savior---the Lamb Who was Slain! And Jesus tells us in today's Gospel how we need to develop, nurture, and grow in that relationship: through living the life of the Beatitudes.

In the poverty of spirit that we develop, foster, and work on to have that spirit of poverty; in that sense of mourning---compassion, longing to bring comfort to those in need; in our hungering and thirsting for righteousness, which is the only way we will be truly satisfied; in our being merciful, longing to show mercy to others; in our efforts to make peace---to live in peace---to work for peace---

because that is what the “children of God” do; being willing, even anxious, to endure suffering, insult, or persecution---because that is the way to complete oneness with Jesus!

That is why all people are called to----challenged to----live holy lives---to live in God’s love---to share God’s love with others by treating those we encounter, whether they are our fellow Sisters or total strangers, with kindness, compassion and respect.

Holiness isn’t something artificial; it’s not a project that we pick up, and then lay back down again until the next time, like crocheting or working on a puzzle. Quite the contrary, holiness is a good habit; it is an extension of who and what we are. It becomes 2nd nature---it is our identity. Holiness means living lives of integrity and truth---it means forgiving others when they injure us---it means giving up our prejudices and taking on God’s way of seeing all people, as St. John told us, *“as God’s children now.”* We don’t know what will come later, but *“we do know that when it is revealed, we shall be like Him!”*

Becoming holy doesn’t happen all at once, as each of us knows so well. It takes practice---it involves trial and error---that’s why we all need the Sacrament of Reconciliation so often. But hopefully we get to the point that we have more successes than failures, more virtuous choices than sinful ones, more Christ-like actions than just purely human ones. We need to long for how the Beatitudes call us to live---in solidarity with one another, and in union with Jesus, our Brother---our Savior---the Lamb Who was slain to bring us the Victory!

May the love of God fill us with a greater measure of His presence, His power and His Holy Spirit, in union with the whole Communion of Saints who cheer us on and can’t wait to welcome us Home!

God bless you, now and always.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

+ Bishop Paul J. Bradley