

The word that keeps popping up today is **joy**.

- Today the Church invites us to **lift our gaze to heaven**,
- to call to mind our **older brothers and sisters** who not only **persevered in their faith** while they lived on earth,
- but actually lived their lives in such a way that **they built up Christ's Kingdom** in the world.
- They not only **resisted** the onslaughts of evil, but they **conquered** territory for good.
- Now they are enjoying their **reward**, and that should give **us** joy too.

Not because **their achievement** takes away the **problems** we still have to face here on earth - it **doesn't**.

- Today's joy doesn't come from a **false** gospel that you sometimes hear preached on **TV** these days: the gospel of "**prosperity**," which promises **heaven on earth**.
- That's not Christian joy.
- Jesus **never promised heaven on earth** - in fact, he promised that following him mean carrying **crosses** and facing **persecution**.

So where **does** today's joy come from?

First of all, it comes from **sharing in the victory of the saints**.

- They are our brothers and sisters, and so their victory **belongs to us too**.
- If your brother wins the Olympic **gold medal**, you would be filled with **joy**.
- The saints have won much **more** than that, and they are our **siblings**.

Second, today's joy **also** comes from being reminded that God has given **us** the **three tools** we need to **follow in the saints' footsteps** - to win the gold medal **ourselves** and make it to **heaven**.

First Tool: Knowing Our Destination (linked to First Reading)

The first tool is **knowledge of our destination**.

We know where we are going in life! We know what comes after death!

This is what the **First Reading** reminds us of.

- St John sees God's **angels of destruction** hovering over the four corners of the earth.
- Their job is to put an **end to human history**, that sorry story of sin, greed, injustice, and destruction.
- Yes, this world **will** come to an end. God will **not permit** injustice, sorrow, and sin to last **forever**. He will **put things right**.

- So St John sees these angels poised to do **damage**, but then he sees that they are **instructed to wait**: "Do not **damage** the land or the sea or the trees until we put the **seal** on the **foreheads** of the servants of our God."

What is that **seal** on the foreheads of God's servants?

- It is the **sign of the cross** that the **bishop** makes with the sacred **chrism** when he anoints us at the moment of our **confirmation**.
- It marks us as **followers of Christ**.
- And **all of human history** from the time of Christ's first coming has **one purpose**: for **every human being** to have an opportunity to **receive that mark**, to become Christ's **follower**.
- Those who do will be **clothed** in the white robe of **grace** and enter into **eternal life**, which starts here on earth and lasts forever in heaven.

This is **where** we are going, and we **know** it!

That is the **first tool** that can help us follow in the saints' footsteps.

(optional brief illustrations for "First Tool")

RESURRECTION AND MIRACLES OF SAINTS

Christ has proven it by his own **resurrection**, and by the **unceasing flow of miracles** that he grants to his Church **through the saints**.

- To be **canonized**, at least **two authentic miracles** have to be **granted** through the saint's **intercession**.
- And there are **thousands** of canonized saints!
- Their miracles are the **final proof** that they were **true followers** of Christ and are now with him in **heaven**, participating in his **saving power**.

They prove that heaven is **real**, and that following Christ **gets** us there! This is a cause for **joy**!

SUICIDE, DEPRESSION, AND A REASON FOR LIVING

The most common reason for **suicide** is **untreated depression**. And the most potent **antidote** to depression is **having a clear purpose** in life.

- A study published by the *American Journal of Psychiatry* in 2002 examined **84 patients** with major depression, of whom **45** had attempted suicide.
- They found that the 39 who had **not** attempted suicide scored high on the **"Reasons for Living Inventory"**.
- The 45 who **had** attempted suicide scored high for **hopelessness**.

Christ has given us a **reason for living**, a reason to **persevere in life's duties and hardships**, a **destination to look forward to** and set our sites on.

Second Tool: Knowing Who We Are (linked to Second Reading)

But it is not **enough** to know where we are going.

As human beings we also need to know **who we are**.

- We need to know where we **fit** in the universe. We need to know **where we came from** as well as where we are **going**.
- Since we are created in **God's image**, we have a **basic need** not only to **love**, but to **be loved**. And we can't be loved if we aren't **known**. And we can't be **known** unless we have an **identity**.
- We have to know that we are **someone**, not just a **nameless speck** in the universe.

The **Second Reading** reminds us of who are:

- "See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are."
- **Children of God**. Members of God's **family**. We have **Christ's blood** flowing through our veins. Just as all the **saints** did.
- The saints not only **knew** this, but they **lived in accordance** with it.

Many parts of the Catholic Church have the tradition of **choosing a confirmation name** - the name of a **saint** who has especially **inspired** us, with whom we can **identify** in a personal way.

- Today let's **renew** that choice.
- It is a **symbolic** way to **recommit** to our **true identity** as children of God,
- and that identity is the **second tool** God gives us to help us follow in the **saints' footsteps**, so we can **share in their joy**.

(optional brief illustrations for "Second Tool")

GETTING LOST IN A MALL

Imagine entering a huge mall you've never been to before.

- You walk up to the little map near the entrance and you find the store you're looking for.
- But then you realize that the **designer** of the map forgot to put one of those **little orange dots** there that says, "**You are here**." So you have no idea how to get to the store.
- It's useless to know our **destination** if we don't know where we are **starting** from, **who we are**.

Third Tool: Knowing How to Reach the Destination (linked to Gospel)

But it is not **enough** just to know **who we are** and **where** we are supposed to be **going**.

We also need to know **how to get there**.

This is what today's Gospel passage reminds us of: the **Beatitudes**, the **basic attitudes of Christ**, and the **basic attitudes that help us live as Christians**.

- St Matthew places the Beatitudes at the **start** of Christ's Sermon on the Mount.
- They serve as a **summary** of everything else Jesus will **say** throughout the Gospel.
- They also summarize everything that Jesus himself **lived out** during his time on earth.
- The Beatitudes take the Ten Commandments to their **fulfillment**.
- The Commandments were about **exterior actions**: "Thou shalt" and "thou shalt not."
- The Beatitudes are about the **inner attitude of the heart** that **produces** action: "Blessed **are** the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers." What we **do** flows out from what we **are**.

Since we are children of God, sons and daughters in the Son, Christ, we should **act like Christ**.

- Christ himself is the **way** to our destination.
- Christ **loved the Father by fulfilling his will** even to the point of dying on a cross.
- He **loved his neighbor** by **leaving behind** the glory of heaven and **coming** to earth to teach, heal, and forgive our sins.
- **Loving God and neighbor** - this is the core of all the Beatitudes: an **attitude of the heart** that **focuses** more on **God** and **others** than on **self**.

Conclusion: Looking to Heaven

In **every** Mass our prayers are joined with those of all the **angels and saints**, **thanking** God and **asking** for grace.

But many times we are so **preoccupied** with the hardships of life here on earth in the Church **Militant** that we pay little attention to the Church **Triumphant**.

Today, as Christ in the Eucharist once again **lays a bridge** between heaven and earth, let's lift our eyes to the **Triumph**, and let our hearts **rejoice**.