

The Solemnity of All Saints: Our Heroes, the Saints

Do you like heroes? I really loved them when I was a kid. Who is better – Superman or Batman? Wonder Woman or Super Girl? Aquaman, The Fantastic Four, XMen, there are so many and they're all fascinating.

The biographers of saints of the past centuries also built on this fascination. Many times saints were presented as having all sorts of powers beyond those of normal human beings. For example, St. Francis of Assisi was a preacher with his eyes set on the journey to Christ. He was determined to fight against the materialism that was taking hold of the people of his time. He demanded that they return to the spirituality that was the strength of the Church. But St. Francis is often portrayed as having powers that normal people would not have, like having conversations with animals. Maybe he did, and maybe he didn't. My point is that many biographers cloud the messages of their subject's lives with pietistic fantasy.

In our lifetime, we have experienced the lives of many great Catholics some of whom will most likely have their holiness recognized by the Church in the process we call canonization. Two of these are, of course, Blessed Mother Theresa and John Paul II. Now I have to ask you, do you need to hear that either had some sort of extraordinary power that demonstrated their holiness? Of course not. We saw their holiness. We experienced their guidance to Christ. We know how each built up the Church with her and his spirituality. We know how they called us to follow them. However, it is easier for us to transform them into preternatural beings with powers the ordinary person will never have. That way, we don't have to listen so closely to the message of their lives. After all, following them would then not really be possible.

Attributing all sorts of strange powers to the saints actually diminishes their message. Instead of seeing them as people like us whose heroic lives we can follow, we turn them into preternatural creatures with powers beyond our capability. This is why when Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Social Worker, the worker with the poor in New York City, was once told that she would be canonized, she responded, "I will not be dismissed so easily."

We should not dismiss the saints so easily by turning them into plastic, fantasy figurines, whose lives are nice stories but impossible for us to follow. No, the saints were and are real people who had to fight the same battles we all fight to serve the Lord. Some of them had terrible tempers, like St. Jerome and St. Paul. Some of them had to recover their spiritual lives after giving in to sin, like St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Francis of Assisi, and, of course, St. Augustine. Some had to be courageous and stand for the faith when every fiber of their body was terrified at what would happen to them, like St. Thomas More & St. Ignatius of Antioch.

The saints were normal human beings like you and me, only they were better at being human than the rest of us. They were fully human. To be fully human is to allow the best of our humanity to dominate our lives. As human beings we are both physical and spiritual. The saints allow the spiritual aspect of their lives to be integrated into the physical. They were and are the best of us.

The first reading for today from the *Book of Revelations* presents them as gathered around the throne of the Lord. They are seen as very special people, who have answered the call to serve God, people who took their baptism so seriously that they clothed themselves white in the Blood of the Lamb. What a wonderful phrase: Clothed white in the Blood of the Lamb. The baptismal gown is white. To really live their baptism, the saints embraced the sacrifice of Christ. They accepted the blood.

We honor the saints today. We recognize that they are with God and we call upon their intercession. What do we mean by that? We ask the saints to pray to the Lord for us, to help us in the struggles of our lives. We ask the saints to help us also embrace our baptism in such a way that we also will be clothed white in the Blood of the Lamb.

The saints are our heroes. But they are neither the Fantastic Four nor the Fantastic One Hundred and Forty Four Thousand. The saints are real people whose heroic lives give us the example of what it is to be fully human, and whose prayers give us the grace to be fully the Lord's.