

This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it! (Ps 118:24)

We are invited to deeply rejoice today as we celebrate all the saints, past, present, and yet to come. Today we are reminded that the Body of Christ, the Church, is greater, bigger, more beautiful than what we can comprehend or imagine. As we are celebrating the saints from all times, maybe this is the opportunity to think about what is a saint.

Born and raised in the French Roman Catholic Church, I heard and read many stories of saints. All these saints did amazing things, from singing when being devoured by lions, or when being cut alive with a saw. They did not all die as martyrs, but they all did things so amazing, so "unnatural", that I could not see, and still can not see what I have in common with them. We had statues in the church of many of these venerable ancestors in the faith. They were reminders of what sainthood is: a very special status reserved for a small group of elite Christians, with unimaginable strength, unimaginable courage, with faith as strong as a rock, and so brave and courageous under duress or persecution. They were also a reminder of my own weaknesses and small faith. I was also taught that on All Saints Day one should not think or pray for one's deceased loved ones; we were supposed to do so the following day, on All Souls day. No, on All Saints we were supposed to give thanks to God for the saints of the church, those who did not find their place on the official church calendar.

That begs once again the question: what is a saint? Saints have no super-power. Saints are not perfect. Saints are men and women, teens and children, who live their lives --or lived their lives-- doing their best to unite their faith in God and their actions. Saints are those who put their trust in the Lord and allow God to use them in the ordinary of their lives. Saints are people like you, like me, ordinary people struggling to follow Christ's teaching to love and serve. Saints are ordinary people, regular men and women, teens, and children, who do their best to put Christ, God, at the right place in their lives. People who struggle to do the right things and do not hesitate to turn to God asking for help, forgiveness, courage. Saints are people who keep following Christ despite all their limitations, trials, problems. Once again, saints are people like you, like me. It is one detail that I love in Paul's letters: when he begins a letter most of the time he writes: to the saints of Rome, Philippi, and so on. For Paul, and for the first Christians, the saints were their brothers and sisters in Christ. If Paul were with us today, he would say to us: Greetings to the saints of St Luke's. Are you aware that you are the witnesses of Christ's love for those you encounter, those you work with, those you serve, those you play with? Are you aware that you are the saints of today?

I love this All Saints Day because on this day we make the communion of saints more visible: saints dead and alive, saints from the past and from today, united by God's Spirit encompassing us all in God's love. We are united with the great cloud of witnesses that went before us, and their example is encouraging us to keep doing our best to love God and love our neighbor in the ordinariness of our lives. Being a saint is not complicated: we are the saints of today because we have been made in Christ's likeness when we were baptized, and we already were made in God's likeness when we were created. But being a saint is demanding sometimes when we want to take seriously Christ's demanding message of love.

Today we heard the well-known Sermon on the Mount addressed by Jesus to all those who want to follow Him. In this teaching, Jesus declares that the poor in spirit, the mourners, the hungry and thirsty for righteousness, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those persecuted for righteousness' sake are blessed. Blessed, by the way, could have been translated by "Happy". There is a dimension of deep joy in the fact of being blessed by God. But, is not that difficult to listen to? Are we going to say to someone who mourns or to someone who is persecuted: you are

so blessed, or you are so happy? Of course not! Jesus' point is to share with the crowds and with us the true values of the Kingdom of Heaven, which are the complete opposite of the values of this world. In our society we value power, richness, strength, even violence sometimes. The kingdom of God is for those who are meek, pure in heart, poor in spirit, those who want justice and peace. We are blessed, we are invited to rejoice when we are in one of these categories because we do God's will and because we depend on God's grace.

The last blessing or the last invitation to rejoice is for the Christians who are being persecuted for Christ's sake. They are blessed, they are invited to rejoice not because it's awesome to be persecuted, but because in this situation they are united to the sufferings of Christ and of all those who were persecuted before because of their faith. Four years ago, I was deeply troubled and amazed by a video I watched about persecuted Christians all around the world. It was incredible to hear their testimony and to see their joy even in the midst of persecution. One Christian Iraqi in a refugee camp said in broken english: "People see us, and they cry for us because they see all these people who are living in miserable conditions. But believe me, I myself, and my family, you will see joy inside us, because we are believers." And he added: "I don't hate ISIS. I pray for them to God to play with their hearts, to change their minds. I pray for everyone that Jesus will give them time to know him." Young adults from an Asian country said, "As Christians, we are faced with a challenge of poorly believing when we don't see the result of our prayers. But we pray that our oppressors would be saved and accept the Lord as their Savior. We pray for perseverance. We welcome suffering, we are not looking for them, but we understand that suffering is the norm of the Christian life, that suffering is something the Lord calls us to. Please, don't pray for us. Pray with us. If you pray for us, you will pray for the wrong things. You will pray that the church will be safe. We don't pray for these things. We pray that when persecution comes, when they threaten us, when they kill us, that until our last breath we will continue to cry out: Jesus is Lord!"

This is not complicated, to be a saint: when we put our lives in God's hands, when we put our trust in Jesus when we decide to follow Jesus' way of life, we are already sharing in the life of the Kingdom of Heavens; we are already part of the Communion of Saints. This is not complicated. But sometimes it might be challenging. The Good News is that we are not saints because we are better than others, we are saints because of who we are: beloved children of God.

Today, let us give thanks for all the saints that have come before us. Today, let us also pray for the saints of this time, especially those brothers and sisters in faith who are facing real hardships in their minds, bodies, and souls.

In a couple of minutes, we are going to renew our Baptismal Covenant, this is our roadmap to being the saints of today, to live according to the teachings of Jesus, and to follow Him in the difficult paths of unselfish and unconditional love. Blessed are you! Rejoice and be glad, because you are God's own beloved children. Amen.