



Homily – All Saints Day

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St Mary's Cathedral
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As a bishop, one of the great privileges I have is to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation each year in some of our parishes. Because, in this Archdiocese, we generally celebrate the sacrament for young people in their last year of primary schooling, I do my best to visit the young people in the parish beforehand to share my thoughts with them about the meaning of Confirmation and to listen to them explain to me what they have come to understand about the importance of this great sacrament.

One of the many things we often discuss is the particular saint each of the young people has chosen to be their Confirmation patron saint. This is by no means the most important part of the young person's preparation for the sacrament but it does have some very real significance. While the choice may be dictated by family tradition, or by the fact that a famous sports person might have that particular name, or simply by current fashion, I suggest to the young people that behind all of this God may have been at work in their heart because there is something in the story of their chosen saint which God is offering the young Confirmation candidate as a special gift for their future journey in life. *"What is it,"* I ask them, *"that is particularly striking for you in the story of your chosen saint's life? What quality do you find most attractive about this person? Could it be that God is inviting you to make this very same quality a central part of your own life?"*

Another way of asking the same question is to invite people to reflect on what it is about a particular saint's life which makes him or her such a clear example of what being a disciple of Jesus really means. In the end, of course, this is what a saint really is: a committed, faithful follower of Jesus. It is someone who takes Jesus seriously when He says, *"I am the Way, I am the Truth, I am the Life"*, and who then lives his or her life according to that conviction. A saint is someone who genuinely wants to find a way forward in the journey of his or her life, and who decides that the best place to look for the right way is to Jesus, who described Himself as the Way.

A saint is someone who wants to ground his or her life on something solid, something trustworthy, something true, and who realises that the most secure grounding in life can be found in a growing relationship with Jesus, who described Himself as the Truth. A saint is someone who wants to live his or her life to the full and realise all the potential which



lies within, and who understands that communion and friendship with Jesus, who described Himself as the Life, is by far the best way to do this.

If each of us were to reflect on our favourite saints, I am confident that we would see in them exactly this attitude to life playing itself out in practice. It is true of St Mary McKillop, our first Australian saint; it is true of Francis of Assisi, after whom our present Pope is named; it is true of St Therese of Lisieux, whose chapel we have here in the Cathedral; it is true of the saint after whom you were named at your Baptism, or the saint you chose at the time of your own Confirmation.

The thousands of canonised saints in the history of our Church represent, in so many different periods and cultures, the fruitfulness and power of the Gospel as a way of life and of Jesus as the one we follow. The canonised saints are, of course, only the tip of the iceberg. The feast of All Saints, which we celebrate today, invites us to recall the untold millions of faithful people who, often in hidden and seemingly ordinary and even mundane ways, have lived lives of extraordinary faith, courage and fidelity and who, no less than the canonised saints, enjoy the fullness of life with God in heaven. We have known many of them ourselves, even in our own families.

When I was confirmed as an eleven year old, I chose as my patron saint a young Italian boy who died in northern Italy from tuberculosis in the middle of the 19th century. He was just 15 years old. He was a student at the school run by St John Bosco and his name was Dominic Savio. On one occasion, Don Bosco told the boys in the school that God wanted everyone to become a saint, that it was easy to become a saint, and that a great reward awaited all the saints in heaven. Dominic decided, in his youthful enthusiasm, that he must become a saint, so he started fasting, sleeping on hard beds, and spending all his time in the chapel. He took it all so seriously that he made himself ill. Don Bosco became very worried about him so he took him aside one day and told him that this was not what God was asking of him. *"All you have to do to become a saint,"* he said, *"is to do your very best at whatever you are supposed to be doing at any given time. Pray well in the chapel, work well in the classroom, enjoy yourself in the playground, and always put God at the centre of everything."* This is what Dominic started to do: it is why he became one of the youngest people in the history of the Church to become a canonised saint.

To think of ourselves as potential saints might seem a little too presumptuous or big-headed. Most of us are all too well aware of our faults and sinfulness to consider ourselves as saintly, either now or in the future.

But let us remember the words of St John Bosco, that all we are being asked to do is our best in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. Let us remember that we are disciples of Jesus, people who have a secure way in which to walk, a firm truth to which we can commit ourselves, and a God who, in Jesus, is ready to live within us and enable us to be what, without Him, we could never hope to be. All we have to do is open our lives and our hearts to Him. And in remembering all this, and once again committing ourselves to



live this way, we will find that we are able to leave the Cathedral at the end of Mass today full of confidence that our life is heading in the right direction and that we really can be the people God has created us to be and that we, in our deepest hearts, really want to be. We can, indeed, be saints!