

All Saints Day, 2018

All Thy works praise Thee, O Lord, and Thy saints give thanks unto Thee: they show the glory of Thy kingdom, and talk of Thy power. (Ps. 165:10-11)

It was the great promise of the Gospel, that the Lord of all, who before had manifested Himself externally to His servants, should now take up His abode in their hearts. This is the language of the Prophets; you hear it from them time and again. Speaking then of those who love and obey Him, Christ once said "I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. We will come to him, and make our abode with him." (Jn. 16:2,23)

It was not enough for Him to come to us in the flesh, to be seen, to be heard, to be felt and handled by both the holy hands of His mother, and by the profane hands of His torturers; that was not enough. For in all that seeing and handling He was yet external and separate. But after His ascension He descended again through His spirit, and His promise was utterly fulfilled.

There is a certain kind of union with every man and his Creator, if only to be held in existence. But far higher, far more intimate, and far more sacred is the indwelling of God in the hearts of His people. This is so extraordinary that compared with it, He may as well be said not to inhabit other men at all; His presence given rather as a privilege of His true servants.

And this privilege is forever. "And I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Paraclete, that he may abide with you forever." (Jn. 14:16) Forever He said. Not like the Son of Man who was here for a time then departed, but a mighty Spirit who took the souls of the disciples and formed them into a visible society; parts and organs of a mystical body; unseen, grafted onto the body of Christ which is the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

This is the special glory of the One, True, Church; that it's members are not dependent on what is merely visible, not bound together on the outside like stones piled up on top of one another and attached by mortar, but living stones, internally connected, like the hand is connected to the heart by means of veins. This is the One, True, Church; a living body, and one only body, not some mere framework arranged to look like a church.

And this is the great day when we commemorate the vivifying of the Church, the birth of a spiritual and new creature out of an old world which was good as dead. This is the day when we glory in the Communion of Saints in the Most Holy Trinity, in Whom their communion with each other consists. This is an article of the Nicene Creed, among the necessary truths of salvation.

This Communion is the immense company of the elect, who have been separated from this sinful world by God's grace, and regenerated and given the means to persevere in that grace unto life eternal. It is a visible company, but the greatest part of it is invisible, made up even of those who lived in former times beginning with our common parents, Adam and Eve.

This is a Communion outside of which there is no salvation. There is but one mystical body of Christ, there is but one Paraclete Who enlivens it. And the visible Church – which we may see with our eyes – is but a fragment of the true Mt. Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, in which are myriads of those firstborn to salvation, to the spirits of the just who followed, to angels innumerable, to the One Mediator seated upon His throne at the right hand of the Father.

This is the true Church, which reflecting its Master, does not change, except to increase. For the members of the Church visible are ever dying to increase the company of the invisible, and the visible is replaced from out of a mass of human corruption. Generation after generation is born, tried, sifted, strengthened, purified, perfected. Such is the efficacy of that inexhaustible grace which Christ has lodged in His Church, as a principle of life until He comes again like a lion. When a saint lets go his last breath here below, it does but quicken a dead soul somewhere else.

In an age which worships visible efficiency, and which even in the spiritual sphere demands substantial, material results before it will revere and believe, a saint was raised up by God who has touched hearts and souls as few have ever done. This saint was no great religious reformer, nor any kind of famous social reformer; not an apostle carrying the Word of God to the ends of the earth; not a great preacher upon whose words crowds were spellbound and who in fact never preached at all; not a scholar where best minds of the age would gather round his podium after the great lecture. No, this saint was a girl who was unknown except to a very small circle of relatives and friends.

She received no special educational advantages. She lived her life in a quiet little Norman town to which few travelers made their way. Still a mere child in years, yet mature in the things of God, she entered the Carmelite monastery down the road from her home – an obscure convent only recently founded – lacking in the history which attended many other convents. For ten years she lived a life made up for the most part of religious exercises and simple domestic duties; sweeping the floor here, saying the Angelus there; a life to the average man or woman of our times which would appear as colorless and monotonous and seemingly wasted when those quiet talents could have accomplished something in the world, but which the world would forever forfeit. And at age 24 she died of consumption, but over her simple grave were carved the words, "I will spend my heaven doing good upon the earth."

Shortly before her death, this saint, St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, O.C.D., always so humble and so simple, had declared, among other startling prophetic sayings, that "All the world would love her." During the last two years of her life, in obedience to her superiors, she had written in her scanty free time, on poor scraps of paper, an account of her life, and for this, likewise, she foretold a strange success. Today, the Story of a Soul has been translated into every major language, and the literature that has formed around this diary would form a library, and Lisieux now ranks as one of the greatest sites of pilgrimage in the world.

In her book, the young Carmelite explained her theory and practice of her own spiritual life, as a Little Way, or the Way of Spiritual Childhood. It stresses that love, and not great outward achievement, is the fulfilling of the law; that it is character, not career which counts; that since for most souls sanctity – if it is achieved at all – must be achieved in a restricted sphere, with a daily round of small duties, little sacrifices, common tasks and trials, all fulfilled and accepted perfectly and for the love of God, with a generous doing and suffering of the will of God, then God will provide all that is necessary for the highest heroism. Pope Benedict XV called her way "the secret of sanctity."