



ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

THIS SUNDAY November 4 & BEYOND”

“We Are Celebrating the Feast Of All Saints on Sunday”



We are celebrating the Feast of All Saints on Sunday, the closest Sunday to the actual calendar day of November 1. I thought it would be good to talk about it briefly.

Actually, I really only want to talk about the reason such a day even came into being. If we were to consider all of the meanings and applications and reflections and theology that this day (and the days around it) have generated over the last 1200 to 1400 years, this would no longer be a brief reflection for Sunday’s lessons!

Let’s start where most people can jump into the discussion. Most of our society, and a great deal of the world’s cultures, get the idea of a saint, a person who showed in their lives – at the least - great wisdom, kindness, charity, long-suffering, gentleness, patience, you know. Even people alive get called such with those kinds of attributes, “You’re a real saint.” Familiarity is found, too, in the name of a holy person from our western culture and history: “San” or “Santo” or “Santa” is so prevalent around the world due to Latin, and the Spanish languages. So familiar that we often use and say those words without even thinking about what or to whom they refer!

This past week a friend posted a picture onto his social media of choice, of he and his wife at the Hearst Castle on the California Coast, just north of Cambria. It occurred to me that the hundreds of thousands of tourists who have also traveled there can have their memory of the tour quickly stirred if someone mentions the name of the town associated with the Hearsts -- that is, San Simeon. There you go, a Saint name. If we think about it for a minute, we do recognize not just a generic name but that the Rancho was there first, and it was named after a saint.

We can say, then, that people can make the connection, and then can reply, “Well, yes, it’s named after a saint.” Pushed further, they might be able to say, “Well, a saint is a holy person.” Asked to explain, they might just off the top of their head be able to say, “Well, they must have been really important.” Ok, that’s a start.

You may not know who Saint Simeon is, the one the rancho and thus town are named for at the Hearst property. Simeon was an old man who was told by God many years earlier that he would not die until he physically saw the Messiah having come to the People of God, the Jews. This was fulfilled one day while he was in the Temple yard, seeing that a particular woman and man across the way were holding a baby. That parents would bring newborns to the temple to fulfill certain Jewish law was a regular occurrence. But then the Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that this baby was in fact the Messiah. He went over, took the baby in his arms (!) and said aloud, “Now, O Lord, you may set your servant free, for these eyes of mine have seen the Savior, whom you intend for all the world to see!” Mary and Joseph knew who the baby was. They were amazed, though, at this moment of revelation. And an older woman prophetess, Anna, would come up shortly thereafter on that same day and also proclaim the baby as the fulfillment of God’s ancient prophecies. What a day!

And a powerful, holy moment. And the church has recognized Simeon and Anna as Saints ever since! These are the kinds of saints we usually are all able to define.

But that’s not what got us to the feast of All Saints in the first place. In the first place, the day of celebrating All Saints had to do with recognizing martyrs, not necessarily prophets, or workers of holy healings and wonders. The word martyr means literally, “witness.” Martyr was used as shorthand in the first 4 centuries especially for those who came to believe in and follow the Messiah, Jesus, and then even when faced with immediate death would not relent, or recant, their faith in Jesus – they witnessed to it even more! And they were put to death. Witnesses unto death. Martyrs. Not like our culture’s “please don’t be such a martyr!” implying self-serving and ego attention grabbing! There is nothing self-serving about a sword over your neck, or a nail about to be pounded into your hands, or being in the center of a coliseum and the starving wild animals are about to be released, and refusing to give up your faith in Jesus!

The primary reason for establishing a common feast day was because of the desire to honor the great and mounting number of martyrs, especially during the persecution of Emperor Diocletian (284-305), the worst and most extensive of the persecutions. Quite frankly, there were not enough days of the year for a feast day for each martyr and many of them died in groups. A common feast day for all saints, therefore, seemed most appropriate. These kinds of remembrances (like we have now for 9/11, for instance) popped up around the Christian world through the 200’s and 300’s, and memorials probably after every instance of mass martyrdoms. Edessa, Syria, Antioch, Constantinople, Rome.

Eventually, in 609, the Emperor Phocas gave the Pantheon in Rome to Pope Boniface IV, who rededicated it on May 13 under the title ‘Santa Maria ad Martyres’ (or St. Mary and All Martyrs). The Pope chose May 13 probably because there was already a popular celebration already established in the East. John the Deacon wrote, “Pope Boniface, asked the [Emperor Phocas, in Constantinople] to order that in the old temple called the Pantheon, after the pagan filth was removed, a church should be made, to the holy virgin Mary and all the martyrs, so that the commemoration of the saints would take place henceforth where not gods but demons were formerly worshipped.”

So, out came Zeus, Jupiter, Venus, Mars and a pantheon (literally, “of all the gods”) of lesser Roman gods, and in came the remains of martyrs collecting in the catacombs. Twenty-eight cartloads of holy relics of martyrs were said to have been removed from the catacombs and placed beneath the high altar.

Regarding the Feast day itself, apart from the designation of the new church “of all Martyrs,” the change to the designation of November 1 as the feast of All Saints started in Rome and then occurred throughout the rest of the Church over about 100 -150 years. Pope Gregory III (731-741) dedicated a brand new oratory in the original St. Peter’s Basilica in honor of all the saints on November 1, and this date then became the official date for the celebration of the feast of All Saints in Rome. St. Bede recorded the celebration of All Saints Day on November 1 in England before he died in 735, and such a celebration also existed in Salzburg, Austria. It was made permanent when Pope Gregory IV asked King Louis the Pious (778-840) to proclaim November 1 as All Saints Day throughout the Holy Roman Empire.

Of course, God knows who these martyrs were. And to him and to the Church they are Saints. The word of God, the Truth, was proclaimed by these, and could only have been because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in them. This is the beginning and the source of the feast of All Saints – those ones through whom the Holy Spirit gave strength and who gave witness to Jesus Christ in their lives, in the face of death, and died for it.

We give thanks for mortal witness. We pray that we are never in that same situation. But we pray that when the opportunity arises, no matter the consequence, no matter how uncomfortable, no matter the personal loss, we too will be the living martyrs God. All the rest of the Saints.

Fr. Robert G. Eaton, Interim Rector

Readings for this Sunday – All Saints Day

Ecclesiasticus 2:1-11 Psalm 149 Ephesians 1:15-23 Luke 6:27a, 32-36

CALENDAR

SUNDAY: The Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost (All Saints' Day)

8:00a Low Mass (Church)

10:30a Solemn High Mass (Church)

—*The entrance to the church is on 6th Avenue*—

Note: Coffee Hour & Fellowship follow the Mass in the Parish Hall.

MONDAY: 7:00p (AA) Doctors' Group (Fireside Room)

TUESDAY: Noon Mass (St. Mary's Chapel)

FRIDAY: AA Meetings

8:00p Ladies' Group (Fireside Room)

8:15p Men's Group (Parish Hall)

SATURDAY 7:30pm Concert San Diego Master Chorale:
"Charpentier & The French Baroque"