

Solemnity of All Saints – November 1, 2016 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – 6:30pm Solemn Mass – 540 words

On this Solemnity of All Saints we give thanks to Almighty God for the great number of men, women, and children who have gone before us and have merited to be with him for ever in heaven. The first reading told us of St. John’s vision of paradise, in which he sees “a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue”. As we consider that company of holy people today and ask their intercession, we must also reflect on and count the cost of our own discipleship, pondering what we must do to join their number one day. It has been said that saints are not born – they are made. We pray that God will make each one of us here a saint – that we will be faithful in cooperating with his saving grace.

Today’s gospel relates one aspect of that cost of becoming a saint: it speaks of delayed gratification, even sacrifice. Fewer things are more countercultural in our modern society. This is the world of next-day shipping, drive-thru food, and even drive-thru weddings. Across the gambit, from simple things like shopping to weighty moral matters touching upon the status of persons, we have grown accustomed to getting what we want and often getting it “now”, with little to no sacrifices involved. Our technological age enables us to make instant gratification practically a way of life, and some do adopt that lifestyle; in any case, this cultural trend affects us all in some way.

But hear the words of the gospel, which compare our current state “now” to how things will be “then” in heaven. It tells of mourning now and being consoled later; of making the sacrifices to remain pure now so as to enjoy the vision of God later; of being merciful now and being shown mercy later; and so forth. This gospel is an examination of conscience for us all: Do I have a capacity for sacrifice, for waiting for the good things that God promises in the next life? Do I see God and the life of heaven as being the ultimate fulfillment of the deepest desires of my heart? Or do I seek the fulfillment of my desires in things of this world, in the easy instant gratification that this world offers?

Our psalm today puts it all another way. First the psalmist questions: “Who can ascend the mountain of the Lord? Or who may stand in his holy place?”. Then he answers: “[The] one whose hands are sinless, whose heart is clean, who desires not what is vain”. May the Lord save us from the vain worldliness in which we are immersed! May he purify our hearts and cleanse our hands, especially by helping us to make good and proper use of his sacraments. We make the psalm response our own, as a sort of aspiration that we could repeat continuously each day: “Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face”! Tonight, then, we ask that great multitude that already sees God face-to-face in heaven to pray for us and obtain the special graces we need so that we may join with them some day. All you holy saints of God, pray for us.