

Timothy J. Grassi

All Saints, November 1, 2020

Why did God make me? God made me to know Him, to Love Him, and to serve Him in this world and to be happy with Him for all eternity in the next. Straight out of the Baltimore Catechism, right! So, what that says is that our goal is what today's feast day is all about; it's about becoming SAINTS! It's about being with God for all eternity. That's what a saint is – a person who is in Heaven with God for all eternity. So, our challenge as soldiers for Christ in the Church militant is to strive to grow in virtue and avoid sin so that when we die we will join the Church Triumphant, in Heaven. On this feast of All Saints, I'd like to share with you about a few saints to give you a flavor of how we go about doing that.

The first is St. John Mary Vianney. St. John Vianney was born in France at the time of the French Revolution. From a very early age he was very pious and wanted to become a priest. He was of average intelligence, but struggled very hard with learning Latin. He was not successful and he was kicked out of seminary but later trained by a good bishop and was eventually ordained a priest on August 13, 1815, with much suffering along the way. What he lacked in intelligence he excelled at in the spiritual life and virtue. He was sent to the small hamlet of Ars where he spent the rest of his life as the Cure of Ars; the humble priest of Ars. He worked tirelessly to stop the immorality in Ars and to help the people grow in virtue. His greatest work was in the confessional and the direction of souls. He spent 16 to 18 hours a day in the confessional and people came to him from all over France and eventually from all over the world. He was known to be able to read souls and his instructions both in the confessional and from the pulpit were said to be very practical and understandable. He practiced mortification or denying himself from his earliest years including insufficient food and sleep for nearly 40 years of his life. He fought the devil where you could see that even his bedposts were charred in the battle. He worked til his death at age 73, tirelessly for the salvation of souls always with humility, gentleness, patience and cheerfulness.

The second is St. Maximilian Kolbe. He was a Polish, Franciscan priest who was very scholarly and got doctorate degrees in Rome. As a young boy he had a vision of the Blessed Mother and She held out 2 crowns, one red for martyrdom and one white for purity and asked him which he would choose. He chose both. He ended up founding a printing shop where he printed the Immaculata magazine with Catholic information and teaching. It was not well received by the Nazis. Consequently, he was captured and brought to Auschwitz.

While there, he ended up offering his own life in place of another prisoner. Although they tried to starve him to death, he would not die. They ended up giving him a lethal dose to kill him after nearly 2 weeks of no food or water. He died on the eve of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The third is St. Padre Pio. He was another Franciscan priest, but from a small town of Pietrelcina in Italy. He was very poor and led a very pious childhood. He wanted to become a priest and went to the Franciscans to do so. He is most known for having the stigmata; the wounds of Christ for 50 years. His hands, feet and side oozed blood that was very pleasantly aromatic and he offered up his suffering for the salvation of souls. He spent many hours in the confessional and people waited, sometimes, days to go to confession to him. He could read souls and would frequently dismiss a penitent and tell them to come back after they had further examined their conscience. He suffered greatly because the Church officials became suspicious of him and silenced him for 12 years. It was very painful, because he was so concerned for the salvation of souls. He was known to bi-locate and be seen in different parts of the world at the same time in order to assist souls. He died in 1968.

Lastly, I think it is appropriate to speak of what happened this weekend in Connecticut. Fr. Michael J. McGivney was Beatified, i.e. made “Blessed” on his way to canonization. He was the son of Irish Immigrants who became a humble parish priest. He is the founder of the K of C. And the reason he founded the Knights was to keep men from leaving the faith, and in particular to keep men away from the Masons. Father McGivney was a roll up your sleeves, face adversity head-on, thick-skinned kind of guy. He worked tirelessly for the Church and especially the flock entrusted to him when an anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic movement was rampant. He died at the young age of 38 from pneumonia.

So does this mean that only priests can become saints? Absolutely NOT! However, I want to get back to our challenge as soldiers for Christ in the Church militant to strive to grow in virtue and avoid sin so that when we die we will join the Saints in the Church Triumphant, in Heaven. And I want to propose that it is in large part through the ministry of priests that this happens and as we begin this vocation awareness week, I thought it was especially appropriate to make this point. Priests are the instruments God uses to prepare souls to become saints. For 2000 years priests have failed miserably, remember the Apostles who abandoned Christ before His passion, but despite ourselves, we still try to do the job. I couldn't help but think of this during this Corona Virus when so many were deprived of the Sacraments, even myself, scheduling to meet a priest in a state park

so that I could go to confession. Think of what life would be like without a priest. I have been trying since Wednesday to go to confession and I have not been able to connect with a priest! So, now I'm over 2 weeks and I don't like that. The priest is expected to abandon himself. He is obedient to another. It is the priest who received your soul at Baptism. It is the priest who restored your soul when you sin. It is the priest who nourishes your soul with the Holy Eucharist that we would not have without the priest, and I hope the Corona Virus has brought this into perspective. The point is this, the priest is not a priest for himself. He does not give himself absolution; he does not administer the Sacraments to himself. He is not for himself; he is for you! His whole purpose is to prepare you for Christ. The priesthood is the love of the heart of Christ as St. John Vianney said. So, I know I'm preaching to no eligible candidates, but we need priests; we need holy, faithful priests who are in love with JC and is there for you and we need them **DESPERATELY** in our Diocese. Please, I exhort you to pray the Novena inserted in the bulletin. We will be praying it at the end of each Mass for the next nine days, but you can do it from home if you can't come to Mass. Without priests, the consequences are very dire, I will not become a saint without a priest! My prayer is that of St. John Vianney, "My God, you have given me all, behold the little I give you. Give me the strength to give more."