

The Solemnity of All Saints

Homily

Happiness is something everybody wants. Not everyone agrees on what it is, or how it can be obtained, but everybody wants it. Walk into any bookshop or browse the internet and you'll see a plethora of tips, strategies and programs to make you happy. You might think it would be exotic holidays and expensive Italian cars that make us happy, but according to a new survey sponsored by healthcare group Bupa, we don't actually need any of that fancy stuff to find happiness; it's the simple things that really make us feel happy. The top fifty answers to the question *What makes you happy* include things like:

Feeling the sun on my face

The smell of fresh baked bread

A random act of kindness from a stranger

Finding a good bargain

Finding a £10 note in my jacket pocket

Waking up before the alarm and realizing I have more time to sleep

Seeing a rainbow

Popping bubble wrap

Hearing my grandchildren laugh

Yes, thank God for the little things that put a smile on our face and make us feel warm inside. Perhaps at the moment we're appreciating them more than ever. But what happens when the sun is hidden by grey clouds, you've overslept, and the grandchildren are screaming instead of laughing? Where are we left if our happiness depends solely on even these sorts of little things?

Fortunately the Church has a clear idea about where our true happiness lies: **true and lasting happiness is to be found in the vision of God**. Other things, pleasurable as they may be for a while, lose their attraction over time. They offer a happiness that comes with the superficial and fleeting pleasure of the senses. But not so the vision of God in heaven. Heaven will be the gift that keeps on giving, where we will see God perfectly, love God perfectly, and enjoy God perfectly. In that state of being we'll be perfectly happy forever because once we're in possession of the vision of God, what else could there be for us to want or desire?

That vision of God to which we should all aspire, and which the beauty of Catholic worship ought to point us towards here on earth, isn't something we can acquire under our own steam, but that doesn't make it a fanciful dream. The help of God's grace is available to get us to heaven; all we need do is avail ourselves of it - in the sacraments, in prayer, in God's holy Word. Today we celebrate the "cloud of witnesses" who did just that. Countless men and women and children of every place and age who allowed God to live in them and who are now with God in heaven happily enjoying his vision. The famous ones declared saints by the Church - like St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Augustine, and so on who inspire us with their witness, their prayers and their fellowship – and the many more anonymous ones who are nevertheless our friends, our intercessors and our companions.

Nor should we think that it's only a few truly exceptional individuals who measure up. St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. Augustine, we shouldn't forget, all had very colourful pasts: Peter denied Christ, Paul persecuted his followers, and Augustine embraced a colourful lifestyle, to say the least. **It's what they did with Christ's help that made them saints**, not what they got up to prior to accepting that help. They weren't born saints; they were fashioned into saints by the divine grace working in them.

That same dynamic is true for us: with Christ's grace we can attain sanctity and we shouldn't allow what we've done in the past – either years ago or yesterday – to hold us back. We can be people of the beatitudes if, *like Jesus*, we are poor in spirit, good and merciful; if we really seek what is just and right; if we are pure of heart, peacemakers, lovers of the poor; if we give our lives to Christ and the demands of his Gospel.

True happiness is not only possible; human beings are made for it and called to it. We start the journey towards it in this life and end it in the next. Let's accept the help God offers us to attain it and so be truly blessed in this life and happy forever with him in the next.