

**The Praise of Triune Glory**  
Vigil of All Saints  
Priory of the Immaculate Conception  
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What is the meaning of life? St Paul gives us the answer. The meaning of life is to exist for the praise of God's glory. And we do this by sharing in "the riches of the Father's glorious inheritance in the saints" (Eph 1:18). Now, the Saints' inheritance is to participate in the life of the Blessed Trinity (CCC 257). This is the meaning of life and this is what we celebrate on this Feast of All Saints. We celebrate the life of those in Heaven, where God is all in all and the Saints are transfigured in glory—a life of peace, satisfaction, and bliss. This is a life where all that we know we're called to be is finally fulfilled and surpassed beyond all our hopes. This is the glorious inheritance of the Saints. And this abundant human flourishing is precisely the praise of God's glory. "The glory of God is man fully alive," says St Irenaeus. My suggestion tonight is that for us to become praises of Triune glory, we need the Communion of Saints. How so?

The Communion of Saints is the supernatural counterpart to the radical relationality of humanity: we exist in relationships. No one could ever exist alone since we are inherently interdependent. Before being Pope, Cardinal Ratzinger noted that being human entails three things: being from, being for, and being with. What does he mean? First, we exist as "being from" others. We did not give birth to ourselves. But even beyond this, on all levels of life, we remain radically dependent on others. Second, since others depend on us, we exist as "being for" others. If we are to be responsible members of humanity, we must contribute to the common good by "being for" others. And third, our interdependence in "being with" others leads to friendship. And this friendship constitutes humanity's true happiness.

We were created to be in relationships of knowing and loving because we were made in the image of God. Ratzinger has attributed these three expressions—being for, being from, and being with—to the three Persons of the Trinity. The Father in begetting the Son is "being for" the Son, while the Son as begotten is "being from" the Father. And finally, the Holy Spirit as the bond of love between Father and Son is "being with" the Father and Son. Ratzinger says, "the true God is, of his own nature, being-for (Father), being-from (Son), and being-with (Holy Spirit). Yet man is in the image of God precisely because the being for, from, and with constitute the basic anthropological shape" (*Truth and Tolerance*, 248).

Ratzinger's words say something about what it means for man to be fully alive and so become the praise of God's glory. Humanity must be in communion with others to be fully alive. Being for, from, and with others opens up a space in our hearts for another. The broader and deeper this space becomes, the more space God will have to fill with His own being. Furthermore, since God himself is a Communion of Persons, it takes a Communion of Saints to offer fitting praise.

From all eternity, the Triune persons have been mutually indwelling and interpenetrating one another in a divine dance of knowing and loving (*i.e.*, circumincession and perichoresis). By giving of ourselves in this life, our souls become, in the words of Blessed Elizabeth, "a bottomless abyss into which God can flow and expand." This participation in the Triune life effectively makes one a praise of glory. The creature glorifies its Creator by manifesting—to some degree—an aspect

of God's own Beauty. And so Blessed Elizabeth continues to describe the praise of glory in this way: "the soul is also like a crystal through which God can radiate and contemplate all His perfections and His own splendor."

In this, the Communion of Saints is like a kaleidoscope. A kaleidoscope is made up of various colors of crystal. Each crystal makes manifest a limited aspect of the pure light it receives. As the Master spins life into the kaleidoscope, the colors dance around and interpenetrate one another. The dynamism of all the manifold colors far surpasses the splendor of any one crystal. So it is with the Communion of Saints. The diverse gifts of the Saints sparkle with glory as the Saints are pulled into the choreography of God's own love. It's precisely the Saints' being for, from, and with others that is capable of manifesting something of the Trinity's own mysterious being for, from, and with. In other words, it's through relationships of love that we can glorify the God who is Love (cf CCC 813, 2205). So how can we prepare ourselves to be suitable vessels for such a glorious life? For the rest of my reflections, I will offer some suggestions in terms of being from, for, and with all the Saints.

### **Being From**

First, "being from." The being we received from our ancestors is wounded by original sin. Hence we are disposed against the very open and generous love which would be our true happiness. Being from, for, and with another became difficult for us. We were like a seed: self-enclosed, lifeless, hardened, and unfruitful. But Jesus came as the grain of wheat, falling into the earth, dying, and being broken open for our sake. Jesus entered into us and broke open the rigid shell that kept us closed to others—closed to God. Through the grace of faith and baptism, we died with Christ and were broken open with him. Our roots and sprouts could then flower outward and bear fruit in his name. We received a new beginning, a new "being from." We were grafted as a branch onto the Living Vine. And only through humble dependence on Christ, do we abide in this new "being from."

This new "being from" we do not possess as much as share. Not only does the Vine not belong to us, but we are not the only branch. There are others. Some we can see. Others are on the other side of the fence, but all are united. Whether of earth, purgatory, or Heaven, we all have one spiritual sap running through our veins. We share a union stronger than death. And we have our being from some of the other branches as well: ministers of the Sacraments, teachers of the Faith, witnesses to the Life, those who have passed on the Faith throughout the ages—all the way back to the lowly handmaid of Nazareth, who first said "Yes!" to Jesus. We are utterly dependent upon all these. And together we bear the fruit of the Vine for the glory of God. Jesus says, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit" (Jn 15:8). It's Jesus who enables us to be praises of the Father's glory. It's Jesus who empowers us to glorify Divine Love. He pours out the Holy Spirit into us, so that we too may be poured out for others. He hands himself over to us in the Eucharist so that we too may be handed over to others. It's by having our being from Jesus that we can exist for others.

### **Being For**

This brings us to my second point, "being for." Jesus, the man for others—and more than that—Jesus, the God for others, empowered the Saints to be for others. This was because they first and foremost existed solely for the Lord. The Saints handed themselves over to God to be at His complete disposal: to do His will and exist for the praise of His glory. They gave God permission to

freely use them however He wished. And without hesitation, God chose to spend His Saints for the sake of the world. It's as if God deposited the Saints into the common fund of the Church (cf CCC 1476). Their talents, gifts, charisms—their very persons—were now the common property of the Church, to be shared by all her members (cf CCC 947-8). By belonging to God alone, the Saints became the common property of all.

There are two dimensions to this: one more visible, the other hidden. The Saints are the common property of the Church, visibly, in their utter dedication and service to the Church. We saw this in the reading about St Peter Martyr. He put his own self-concern aside and battled man and demon alike to combat heresy. He was no longer his own; God was free to spend him however he wished. Eventually, this defense of the Church's teaching would come at the cost of St Peter's life. One could say the Church reached into her common fund and spent his life for the sake of her truth.

The Saints are also the common property of the Church in a hidden more mysterious dimension. Their prayers, sacrifices, and acts of love win grace and merit for the whole Church. This is another way Jesus, the true Vine, chooses to bear fruit in his branches. The fruitfulness of a self-giving love can sprout blossoms in ways unknown. This is the veiled mystery that St Teresa Benedicta lived behind the convent walls and spoke about in the reading. The hiddenness of it all serves to intensify the degree of self-giving; it ensures that making an offering to God does not digress into making a "deal" with God. Our being for God and others must not deviate into being for oneself. Counteracting this self ward pull, brings us to my third and final point: "being with."

## **Being With**

We may not be able to love difficult people right away, but being with the Saints begins to expand our hearts. Reflecting upon these glorious images of God pulls our attention away from ourselves. It gives us a new center-of-gravity—radically oriented toward the other. We can then carry this disposition into encounters with our neighbors.

It's a Saint like Mother Teresa who best exemplifies what it means to have one's being with another. Even in the broken faces of the sick and suffering, Mother revered the mystery of the image of God. She understood the depths of another's soul and so could love him deeply. From intimate knowledge proceeds intimate love. Mother Teresa recognized the profound reality of the other as vividly as she experienced the richness of her own life's breath.

This takes some work and prayerful meditation. One might consider what is most profound about one's own interior life: the depth of desire, the light of understanding, the singular taste of reality, the drive to achieve one's dreams, the agony of suffering, the bliss of happiness, the familiar intimacy with God. These are all very profound things when experienced for oneself. But to truly be with another, one needs to appreciate that such a tremendous weight is also present in the other. It's about valuing the personal sphere in which the other lives, moves, and has his being.

If one's own soul seems profound, one can only imagine the immense weight of a Saint's interior life! In fact, perhaps we should do just that. Imagine what it must be like to love, know, and adore God like a particular Saint. For instance, what would it be like to enter into the Immaculate Heart of Mary and praise God from there? What must it have been like for Mary to receive Gabriel's message and say "Yes!" unconditionally?

Among the Communion of Saints we can do things like this. For, we share in the Church's common fund. We can praise the goodness of God for bestowing a gift, regardless of who receives it. We can even share a Saint's perspective. We can rightly rejoice in God for the graces a Saint has received as if they were our own. St Paul notes that all the members of Christ's Body "drink of the same Holy Spirit" and so when "one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Cor 12:13, 26). Even on an earthly level, the lover is said to possess the gifts of his beloved. If natural empathy links lovers, how much more can pneumatic empathy unite us through the Holy Spirit! So, when St Therese discovered her vocation was love, she claimed to share in every vocation (*Story of a Soul* 192-4). Shortly before her death, she said, "With the Virgins we shall be Virgins, with the Doctors we shall be Doctors, and with the Martyrs we shall be Martyrs, for all the Saints are our relations" (*Last Conversations* 93-4).

The Saints share all in common: the triune life, love, joy, charisms, gifts, and merits—a kaleidoscopic unity in diversity. Even now, through the veil of faith, hope, and love, we can join them, in the manifold melody of their symphonic praise. So tonight, being from, for, and with all the Saints, let us become one praise of glory for the sublime Unity of God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.