

ALL SAINTS

BLESSED ARE THE BEGGARS

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www.sjti.ac.za/resources_homily.htm

First Reading: Apocalypse 7:2-4,9-14
Response: “**Such are the men who seek your face, O Lord**” (Ps.23:6)
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 23:1-6
Second Reading: 1 John 3:1-3
Gospel: Matthew 5:1-12.

We are not born to die. We are born to eternal life, to be saints in heaven. In the resurrection of Jesus we see our own resurrection, our true glory. The Risen Lord beckons us to his glorious state. He became one like us so that we may be one like him.

A saint in heaven is the glory of God. They are innumerable, “**a huge number impossible to count, of people from every nation**” (Apoc.7:9).

The Bible lists saints as those “**who have been brought through the great persecution**” (Apoc.7:14) and “**have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb**” (Apoc.7:14).

“**Such are men who seek your face, O Lord,**” is encouraging response of the Church (Ps. 23:6).

They are the ones “**who shall stand in his holy place. The man with clean hands and pure heart**” (Ps.23:3).

**“Blest are the pure in heart,
For they shall see our God,
the secret of the Lord is theirs,
their soul is Christ’s abode.”**

(John Keble)

John Keble, who wrote this hymn, was invited to hear a school’s rendition of his hymns. Demurring from any tribute to himself, he said: “*My dear children, you sang most beautifully in tune; may your whole lives be equally in tune, and then you will sing with the angels in heaven.*”

St. John, the evangelist, acknowledges our call to holiness. He writes “**we are already the children of God**” (1Jn.3:2), being faithful to Christ in the test of time; and promises that “**we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is**” (1Jn.3:2).

In the Gospel, Jesus shows the way to sainthood. He spells it out in the beatitudes which ends with the assurance that “**your reward will be great in heaven**” (Matt.5:12).

Each beatitude warrants a sermon. Focus here will be on the first one: “**How happy are the poor in spirit**” (Matt.5:2). This was originally written in Greek: Μακαριοι οι πτωχοι τω πνευματι (Makarioi hoi ptochoi to pneumatī).

The operative word here is πτωχοι (ptochoi). The original sense of word *ptochoi* comes from ‘being dependent on’ or ‘to beg’ which generally translates as ‘poor.’

Interestingly, my Afrikaans Bible gives the most favourable interpretation, using the word ‘*afhanklik*’* ‘to be dependent’ on God, not necessarily a pietistic emphasis on pauperism or poverty. *(See Watchword below).

More imagination and use could be made of the original sense of *ptochoi*, poor, where the beggar is seen standing with open hands, full of expectation. Poor in spirit thus captures the sense of open heart and open mind.

Read the beatitudes. Pay special attention to the first: “**Blessed are the poor.**” **Scripture**

Consider the times we stand, full of expectation, with open hands before the Lord. **Liturgy**

Jesus tells us to “**Ask and you shall receive**” (Matt.7:7). Keep begging, like the widow worries the

judge (Lk. 18:3). We are built for prayer and God loves to hear our voices. **Doctrine**

Be humble and empty of self in order to be full of grace. Be open and full of expectation.

Witness

**“Still to the lowly soul
He will Himself impart
And for His temple and His throne
will choose the pure in heart.”**

FOR THE CHILDREN

Read the beatitudes. Explain them. **Is this what makes a saint?**

Bible

Teach the children the proper attitudes for Mass: open hands and open minds.

Eucharist

What is a beatitude? What does it mean to be holy, to be a saint?

Teaching

Children must learn to praise God and talk to him, to beg and pray earnestly.

Witness

FOR TEENAGERS (Shared Christian Praxis)

My Present Action: **What does being poor in spirit mean to you?**

Your Story and Vision: **What have you done? Any plans to do anything?**

Church’s Story: Give Church’s teaching on being poor and poor in spirit.

Church’s Story and Your Story: Consider yours and Church’s commitment to the poor.

Your Vision and Church’s Vision: **What is yours and Church’s vision of Kingdom of God?**

RCIA

In the early Church, its members were called saints (the baptized). There are the saints in heaven called the ‘Church Triumphant,’ the souls in purgatory called the ‘Church Suffering,’ and we on earth, the ‘Church Militant,’ still on the march. The Catechism refers to these ‘Three States,’ viz., as “the pilgrims on earth, the dead being purified, and the blessed in heaven, who all together form the Church,” of which Christ is the head.¹

¹ **CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. # 962.** Geoffrey Chapman, London, England. 1994. P.220.

LIVING OUR FAITH TODAY AS A FAMILY and **PHILOSOPHY**

A Christian family seeks to reason with its faith, to understand the truths of life and faith, such a task is called philosophy. The word comes from the Greek ‘*philo-sophia*’, which means “love of wisdom.” It follows a method of reasoning and *argumentation*, investigating basic thoughts we take for granted. We live in a world of ideas. Philosophy is understanding ideas better, especially those that affect every area of life. Priests study philosophy before theology. Philosophy is practical in the sense that it seeks truth and helps to us understand things. It has expanded to special branches of thought, such as *Metaphysics* which studies the nature of reality, including relationships between mind and body, substance and accident, events and causes. Other branches are *Cosmology* (study of the universe) and *Ontology* (being). *Epistemology* concerns itself with the nature of knowledge and relationship between truth and beliefs. *Ethics* is the study of morality, and *Logic*, the study of argument forms. More branches of philosophy will be seen later.

Western philosophy began with the ancient Greeks in a town called *Milesia*. These thinkers conducted their inquiries through observation reason, rather than tradition or revelation, and are considered as the first philosophers.

VIGNETTES OF MY LIFE

Allan considered his move to *Cedara* a strange one, not politically but academically. His intellectual achievements were never for academic reasons but rather for self-improvement and thirst for knowledge. In former times, he and *Brian Duffey*, riding their horses, used to enjoy sharing whatever they learned, especially Greek, where *Duffey* had the advantage. After ordination, they paid for their own studies which was more a past-time and a hobby. Allan had a fascination for languages. In his student years at *Cedara*, he was in a class that eagerly studied Zulu. Later, he and *Duffey* studied Greek as well. In the Valley of Thousand Hills, *John Poole* got him interested in French. Hebrew was completely his own initiative. Linguistics was an obvious major, together with 'Communication.' When Allan did his B.A., he wanted to do his 'Honours' in Linguistics but was encouraged by Professor *van Schoor* of *UNISA*, to go for a Masters degree in Communication, which he then taught at *Cedara* together with Catechetics. He also taught ancient Greek Philosophy to first-year students, until *Walter Juptner OMI*, arrived. *Existentialism* was his *forte*, (basis of his dissertation on *Communication*), but it was not part of the syllabus. Allan put it to *Barry* that he was not really a qualified intellectual to teach and was at *Cedara* due to an emergency situation. *Barry* thought to normalize his position by getting him better qualified. Allan was not sure if he was getting himself off the hook or more onto it. Seeing no way out, and fearing he may be caught up with boring academic curricula in Rome, opted, to enjoy doing special courses with the Jesuits in *Berkeley, California*. *John Ngubane*, the provincial, made it clear that he could not afford it, although Allan knew that it didn't seem problematic when *Barry* went to study under the Jesuits, at St. Louis, in America. Through *Fr. Buti Tlhagale OMI*, Allan made contact with the *EOC (Educational Opportunities Council)*, who agreed to sponsor him overseas. Once again, Allan studied overseas with little or no cost to his province, endorsing the fact that Allan's ongoing education was not an Oblate expense. His *Berkeley* experience is another story to be told.

Cedara was academically stimulating as it became a hotbed of debate. Much of staff recreation consisted of sharing ideas. There were different schools of thought, theologically, philosophically and politically. *Pierro Achiati's* theology differed sharply with Roman orthodoxy, being more inclined to *Rudolph Steiner*, an Austrian mystic with its focus seemingly on reincarnation than the resurrection. *Theo Kneiffel's* philosophy was progressively leftist with the likes of the 'Critical Theory' of *Theodor Adorno* from the '*Frankfurt School*' and his neo-Marxist ilk. *Chris Langeveld*, professor of Moral Theology, advocated a radical 'Liberation Theology' (or 'Contextual Theology'), getting himself more involved in politics and protest marches. Allan found himself participating in the debates but hardly agreeing with anyone's stances. Outside of *Cedara* he was considered an activist, even a hot brick but here by comparison, he seemed hardly a burning ember. The heated debates sometimes amused Allan, to see *Achiatti*, an Italian, make his point to *Kneiffel* by speaking German, and *Kneiffel*, a German, make his point to *Achiatti* in Italian. It was a case of an Italian speaking German and a German speaking Italian. "Stormy heart contended with stormy heart, and *Uruk (Barry)* quietly leaving,"¹ unlike Allan, who stayed pretending to understand it all, by the translatory remarks of *Chris Langeveld*. Allan sometimes sensed an inconsistency in *Kneiffel's* logic, where for example, he said there was no purgatory because there is no time of waiting in eternity but later advocated God is not happy until all his children come home, implying a time of waiting in heaven. Allan wondered where time stood in eternity.

Cedara was progressively becoming a mixed bag of religious orders. *Mariannahill, Dominicans, Redemptorists, Capuchins, Franciscans (Third Order Regular), Pallotines*, and *Jesuits*, were sending their students to study there, and were offering sorely needed expertise for the staff, like *Edgar Wienand CMM, Bernard Connor OP, Larry Kaufmann CSSR, Sean Cahill OFM.Cap.*, and *Jock Earle* and *Nick King*, both *Jesuits*. It was a staff that was not only there to teach the students but there was good intellectual stimulation within the staff itself.

Late, one evening, Allan experienced once again, sharp chest pains and spasms down his arm. Was it another heart-attack? *Barry's* room was next to his and he came and laid hands on Allan and prayed. Immediately, the pains disappeared. *Barry* has probably forgotten that night but Allan will never forget. For him, it was another merciful moment of God acting through the power of prayer. He trusts in the prayers of others, especially when he feels his own is weak. Now, *Barry* was elected to be the next provincial of Natal. *Danny Corijn OMI* was his successor.

¹ **EPIC OF GILGAMESH.** Translation by Sandars N. *Coming of Enkidu.* Penguin. Harmondsworth, UK. 1960. p.62.

WHAT AM I THINKING?

I am thinking of how the 'Litany of Saints' takes me back to my childhood days. I recall the moments we prayed as a family at home and at Church, saying the litany, during devotions and *Benediction*. I had no problem imagining the awesome array of saints in heaven, each so different and unique and I wondered when and if I would join them. Later, I learnt that we become saints already on earth through baptism and actually join the hosts of heaven in celebration of the Mass.

I found it more inspiring to sing the litany than to say it. I preferred the Latin plain chant, although I understood less. It was the language of the early Church fathers and mothers, and I was feeling closer to the roots of the Church and to the saints.

One of my most inspiring moments of the Litany was when it was sung in Zulu, at the Easter Vigil and once again at the ordination of a priest. There were alternating voices calling on the saints, then the whole congregation thundered with one accord: "*Nina bacwebileyo sikhulekeleni!*" (O you great blessed ones, pray for us!).

I realized later that in the early Church, the litany had a place in the Mass. The *Kyrie eleison* is indicative of that. It was a litany that began with an invocation to the Triune God then the intercessions to the Blessed Virgin Mary and finally the angels, martyrs and all the saints to pray for us. This is the Church. This is our liturgy. *Lex orandi, lex credendi*. This is our faith in action.

IMPORTANT WORD: "Saint"

The veneration of saints dates back to the early days of the Church, especially of the martyrs, those who died for Christ like Christ died for us. The imitation of Christ, seen in all forms of holiness, is not just a question of how we die but also how we live. Basic holiness is in all the baptized, with the life of the Triune God. Living it to the full is the real challenge of our faith. Those who succeeded are an inspiration to us and since their death are more alive in Christ. Our veneration of them is called '*dulia*', a form of admiration and calling upon them to pray for us. The highest respect on this level is given to the Blessed Virgin Mary, called '*hyperdulia*'. Supreme adoration and worship is given to God alone. This is called '*latria*'.

Vat.II explains "the authentic cult of saints, as intensifying our love by their example and aiding us by their intercession"¹ Leon Bloy, a French novelist and spiritual writer, wrote: "*Il n'y a qu'une tristesse, c'est de n'être pas des saints*" i.e. "There is only one sadness - not to be a saint."² And Georges Bernanos reminds us, in his '*Diary of a Country Priest*,' that "the grace of God is everywhere."³

¹ LUMEN GENTIUM (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*) No.50.

² BLOY Leon. *LA FEMME PAUVRE – Episode Contemporain* Paris, Mercvre de France. 1946. p.299. (last page).

³ BERNANOS Georges. *JOURNAL D'UN CURE DE CHAMPAGNE*. Paris. 1936. Tr. from French by Pamela Morris. *THE DIARY OF A COUNTRY PRIEST*. Boriswood, London. 1937. p.317, (also last page).

Lumen Gentium, meaning 'Light of the Nations' is a Vatican II document giving the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*. It portrays the *Mystery of the Church* where dwells the Spirit in the hearts of the faithful. It speaks of the *People of God* with whom God made a new covenant. In speaking of the *Hierarchical Structure of the Church*, it stresses the primacy and infallibility of the pope and role of the college of bishops. In bishops are seen the full order of priesthood with ordinary priests deriving their priesthood from the bishop. At the bottom of the hierarchy are deacons, then comes the *Laity* meaning "all except those in Holy Orders."⁴ It speaks of the Church's call to holiness, "to live as become saints"⁵ and mentions '*Religious*', who by "the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience are dedicated to God. It then deals with the *Eschatological Nature of the Church*, leading on to "the promised restoration which has already begun in Christ."⁶ The document ends with the '*Blessed Virgin Mary in the Mystery of Christ and the Church*.' She is the prophetic woman of *Genesis*, the new Eve, the virgin mother, the handmaid of the Lord and "type of the Church,"⁷ a model of faith. In conclusion, she is the "sign of created hope and solace of the wandering People of God."⁸

⁴ LUMEN GENTIUM No.31.

⁵ LUMEN GENTIUM No.40.

⁶ LUMEN GENTIUM No.48.

⁷ LUMEN GENTIUM No.63.

⁸ LUMEN GENTIUM No.68.

Watchword: "*Blessed is the beggar (poor) in spirit*" (Matt.5:3)

Hebrew: אשרי עניי רוח

Ashrey *'aniyey ruah*

Greek: Μακαριοι οι πτωχοι τω πνευματι.

Makarioi hoi *ptochoi* to pneumati.

Latin: Beati *pauperes spiritu*.

Afrikaans: Geseend is die wat weet hoe *afhanklik hulle van God is*. Die BYBEL Nuwe Vertaling.