

The Saintly Chorus

• **A HOMILY** •

It is helpful to start off our saint watch with three important reflections. In this first reflection I ask you to think of the feast of All Saints. This feast is clearly a gorgeous paean to God's mercy, to God's all-inclusiveness; and the rousing song "When the Saints Come Marching In" rightly provokes inspiring and truly awesome feelings. Recall the exotic readings proclaimed at this feast, readings that conjure up the great, heavenly panoramic scene of those vast multitudes of 144,000 saints multiplied endlessly. And that endless crowd provokes many marvelous and compelling imageries, none more powerful, I suggest, than that of a heavenly chorus. Yes, close your eyes for a moment and picture yourself standing in that chorus of endless multiples of 144,000 people, singing a song of faith, singing aloud, if you will, the Creed. And then I ask you to be aware of two things that will be operating as each of us belts out our song, and you must read this carefully to catch its meaning.

The first is this: No one believes it all. No one believes it all. Each of us in the chorus is gifted with only a partial understanding of the mystery of God among us; and so, in our large chorus, one sings with great intensity and assurance, another sings with little attention and conviction. Or perhaps today we're caught by the words and melody because we happen emotionally and spiritually to be in a good place. But, another time, in another mental or emo-

tional place, we feel doubtful and alienated, and we can hardly get the words out of our mouths. That's OK. No one believes it all, but, together, we sing more than we can sing alone. Together we sing more than we can sing alone.

And so the saints, you see, the saints are a chorus, a communion that sings what we cannot and believes those parts we cannot accept. They chant the song of faith with us when we can join them, and they hum the song of faith when we cannot. Together, we, the saints of yesterday and today, sing more than we can sing alone, for no one believes it all, but all believe.

The second thing that operates is this: if no one believes it all, so also no one believes all the time. Our journey of faith is seldom smooth and uninterrupted. At times it fluctuates between belief and unbelief. A few years ago a friend of mine lost her son in an automobile accident. She says that she can no longer believe in God, in a God who would let her son lose his life, especially since she and her family are faithful Catholics and good churchgoers. How could God do this to her? There are three responses to this woman.

The first is to say, "Well, if you can no longer believe, you are no longer a Catholic. You no longer belong." That's a harsh view. It denies the seriousness of her loss.

A second response is to say to her, "You haven't really lost your faith. You're just temporarily depressed. Everything will be fine." Everything will not be fine. This is to deny her pain.

But the third response is to honor her losses, the loss of her son, the loss, or at least, the shock to her faith. The fact of the matter is that tragedy has indeed broken her trust in a loving, provident God. Meanwhile? Meanwhile, the community believes for her. The saintly chorus picks up her faltering verses. The collective faith of the saints sustains her though her period of unbelief; and as she slowly encounters these saints of yesterday and today, she will

begin to see *their* scars and sense *their* resilience, and they will help her believe once more, in the face of tragic absurdity, in a new and different way. They will help her sing with a different modulation. They will sing the louder the phrases that she can only sing softly, if at all.

So, you see, no one—you nor I—believes it all. And no one here believes all the time. No one accepts every verse, and no one can sing every note all the time. But the chorus does. The chorus, or the community of saints, sings when you and I are unwilling or unable to do so. Peter sang for Doubting Thomas until he could believe again. Thomas sang for Denying Peter until he could embrace again. Monica sang for her son Augustine when he was in his period of sinfulness and unbelief until he could repent again. Clare sang for Francis when he was sad until he was glad again. We are a whole community. We are a chorus of saints. We support each other and we become more than the sum total of our individual selves.

You exhibit the gifts I don't have, and I exhibit those you don't have. You cry the tears I cannot cry and I laugh the laughter you cannot laugh. You believe when I struggle with doubts. I believe when you struggle with doubts. You smile when I am in tragedy. I grieve when you are in joy. Our individual pieces are partial. Our faith, our hope, and our love are quite incomplete. But the feast of the saints, of *all* the saints—past, present, and future, those in heaven, earth, and purgatory—tells us something. This feast gives us support. It reminds us of our faith family, that we belong to a vast community of time and space. It becomes a revelation and a comfort. It tells us a mighty, comforting truth: together we sing more than we sing alone. We are a Communion of Saints.