

Rev 7:2-4, 9-14

Ps 24:1bc-2, 3-4ab, 5-6

I Jn 3:1-3

Mt 5:1-12a

Arthus P. Purcaro, O.S.A.

Sports events can help us understand something significant about the feast which the Church invites us to celebrate today: All Saints Day.

Sport fans show support for their team with chants, shouts, waves, bizarre attire, the color of their clothes, body paint ... The number of fans involved is also quite significant, much beyond the intensity of any one particular supporter.

A not insignificant amount of money goes into the entire ritual surrounding sports events, far beyond what is involved in the entrance fee to any particular event. There's a certain amount of money used to bet on one or another team. Inevitably, food is involved, be it pizza, hot dogs, beer or something else. The economic investment is a fairly good indicator of the emotional commitment involved.

In fact, a team which feels the true support of a large number of fans can be bolstered in its performance and the fans can truly be said to be involved in winning the game.

In some sense, the communion of saints, that amorphous, unnamed cloud of sanctity which we commemorate today can be likened to a crowd of fans. These truly committed men and women of all ages who have gone before us, have left us with a great inheritance and yet, they have not abandoned us. They are rooting us on, interceding for us, encouraging us in one way or another to put all our money on the same horse they backed, to sacrifice everything for the same goal they were willing to give their lives for, not a particular sport or hero, but Jesus Christ, son of God, son of Mary. We call to mind Jesus' promise to be present when two or more are gathered in his name. Jesus is present in the communion of saints, the dynamic force which unites each to one another through their love of him. The communion of saints is present to us, encouraging us to do as they did: take Jesus' words in today's Gospel seriously. They saw in the Beatitudes a way of being, a way of life, and they decided to join others in following Jesus' way of life.

The reading from John's letter tells us that it is God's love that transforms us into God's holy people. "See what singular love the Father has for us: we are called children of God, and we really are". We may not always live up to this dignity, but we are indeed God's holy ones.

Saint Augustine, in one of his homilies, exhorted that North African congregation of believers sixteen centuries ago, and yet his words continue to be valid encouragement for

us today. “I, now, am speaking to the true Christians”, he says. “If you believe otherwise, hope otherwise, and love otherwise, then live otherwise, and prove how vastly different your faith, hope, and charity are by the vast difference of your morals” (Sermon 198, 2).

To live otherwise, if we believe differently.

If we are truly Christians, if in fact we truly believe in Jesus and the saving power of his Word, we are challenged to live an alternative life-style, not the politically correct, acceptable behavior of the run-of-the-mill Christian today. We are called to be outstanding:

- to truly love our enemies, which means acquiring the habit of thinking well of them, wishing them well, doing well by them;
- to forgive those who hurt and offend us, which means going beyond revenge and seeking compensation, to becoming true agents of reconciliation in our family and neighborhood;
- to respect the dignity of each and every human being from conception to the tomb by natural death, without discriminating against those who are considered “others” by society and so are “legitimately” treated differently;
- and to serve in solidarity the neediest, those who are considered to be the least among us: those who are hungry, thirsty, in prison, infirm.

To live differently, as Augustine said, to raise our head above the crowd in order to fix our sight on the horizon, fully aware that this world is not our everlasting home, that we are passing through as pilgrims on our way to abundant life in Christ. And yet, while we are here, to give witness as God’s holy people that God’s reign has truly begun and is present among us.

All this obviously is not easy. It is highly personal, but never individual. We can only do this in the context of a community, with others, with their encouragement and support. We are called to live and give witness to a communal holiness, and the communion of saints is there to cheer us on, to invite us to join in their chant, to become one in spirit with them.