

NOVEMBER 1 2024 DEACON MIKE WALSH

One of the great honours I have as a Deacon is to be part of baptism celebrations. I'm always amazed as I sit there. Just the last one I did, there were six children to be baptized, and there was a large congregation. I look out at these young families, and one of my favourite parts of the celebration is when we light the candle for the child. After the baptism, we light the candle from our community candle, the Paschal candle, and we share it. I always tell the parents at that particular moment that their job is to keep this light burning brightly, but they are not alone. Because their children are now surrounded by the Communion of Saints. It's a beautiful term.

Elizabeth Johnson, a Sister of St. Joseph and a well-known theologian, said this: "We can imagine the Communion of Saints as a great stadium of people, all of whom have run or are running a great race." That opening imagery—that we're in this large stadium surrounded by all of these saints who have either run the race already or are running it—is powerful. "As each of us takes our own turn at the starting line..." I think of these young children; they're just out of the starting line, they've just started. Everybody is at a different place in the race. "We are lifted up by love and encouragement of all of those who know well the challenges ahead of us and who have stayed to accompany us and cheer us on the way." Sister Elizabeth concludes, saying, "It is a matter of being inspired by the whole lot of them, this cloud of witnesses to the living God." This is the Communion of Saints. This is what we come to celebrate today.

We've had this term with us since the fifth century. We pray it in our Apostles' Creed. Actually, if you look at the New Testament, you'll see that St. Paul often starts his letters like this, as he did in the letter to the

Philippians, "To all saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi." He called all the faithful 'saints.' We didn't actually start canonizing saints until around the year 993, under Pope John XV. And I won't tell you the name of the first saint, but that's a good thing to go and look up—tremendous Catholic trivia.

The Conference of Catholic Bishops says this: "The saints are persons in Heaven, officially canonized or not, who lived heroically virtuous lives, offered their lives for others, and were martyred for their faith, and who are worthy of imitation." Our saints are worthy of imitation.

You see, the Daily TV Mass community is a community of prayer. Each month, and with each day, we come together and offer our prayers of the faithful. We ask and pray not to the saints but for the help of the saints. Over the past year, you may have noticed that we have a community prayer each month. Next year, we're going to do the same. It's going to be our prayer intentions, and we're going to have a different saint each month—these saints who are worthy of imitation.

What better description of the saints is there than Matthew's Beatitudes that Jesus taught us on the mountain? The Beatitudes are at the very heart of Jesus' preaching. So, here are just a few examples.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." The pure in heart are those who have a heart free of selfish motives, sins, and duplicity. On March 19th, we celebrate the feast day of St. Joseph. Could there be any better example of someone who was free of selfish motives than the one who gave up his life to care for others, for the Holy Family? There

can't be a person, other than Mary and Joseph, who had a more intimate relationship with God, for they shall see God.

"Blessed are those who were persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." Those who suffer for doing what is right for their faith. On June 29th, we'll celebrate the feast day of St. Peter and St. Paul. They'll be our examples that month, as we pray with them that we too might become witnesses to the truth of the gospel.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." This refers to people who are passionately seeking justice, holiness, and a relationship with God. Could there be a better saint than St. Vincent de Paul on September 27th? Many of you belong to St. Vincent de Paul societies, and we pray to and with this saint, that we too might be driven by unceasing charity.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." Spiritual poverty is not what you might think—it doesn't mean you lack great spirituality. It means understanding that you are completely dependent on God, that we need God's grace and guidance. Could there be a better saint than St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus on October 1st? She's reported to have said on her deathbed, "I will spend my heaven doing good on earth." She realized that in heaven, her work continues by looking out as one of the Communion of Saints for all of us.

We understand this. One of the things we know and really feel because of this very special feast day is that we are reassured that we are never alone. This means that we can truly go in peace, going out into the world

to glorify the Lord by living our lives in full communion with the saints in heaven.

God bless.