

Rubbing shoulders with the saints



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February is the month, in which we celebrate the feast of St Valentine, a feast of romance! But during the month of November, we can see more clearly perhaps the reality and challenge and wonder of what love actually is; a month in which we celebrate the triumph of the wisdom of God in which we rejoice with the holy souls and all the saints.

During a homily he preached for the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, in June 2004, then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger said:

'As Christians, we are responsible for maintaining the presence of God in our world, for it is only this presence that has the power to keep man from destroying himself.'

Our faith is not for ourselves alone, as the saints remind us; yet we are experiencing in our time – as very many saints also did – the temptation to keep it to ourselves, for the message is unwelcome: it doesn't fit into the pattern the world seems to be designing. Our pattern is Cross-shaped, but that is the shape of the only Love that endures, it is the shape of Truth, and as Cardinal Ratzinger preached, we have been entrusted with a tremendous responsibility to share and proclaim our faith to the people whose paths we cross in our own lives. Without our God who is Love in their lives, how will people who despair learn to hope? How will people who suffer, or are lost, or are lonely

realise their worth: that their lives have meaning and value beyond anything they could ever imagine?

God is love, of course, and all time belongs to Him, so why November and not months in which we celebrate the Paschal mystery, or Christmas, or other feasts of the Lord, who loved us first? This truth, however, is only obvious to us who have come to know and believe in God as revealed to us in Jesus; but not to the world as it seems to be intent on eradicating Him from our memory. And it is not apparent to generations of people who are being raised without any reference to God; who do not live in an 'atmosphere of faith'; who may even be taught that He does not exist. If God is not love and love is not God, what then is love? Are we afraid of the potential of our humanity? Or is it that we have lost our way? Or worse, stopped looking for the right way to go, that will lead us into joy? It seems like a very gloomy reality, without hope.

But we are, this month, rubbing shoulders as it were, with sinners who have made it into heaven and are living proof that God's folly is wiser than human wisdom and that His weakness is stronger than human strength. They had the courageous determination during their lives, to believe, to hope in, and to love God. Their faith and their hope inspired them to live from the conviction that love is what makes our existence meaningful and valuable; failure, back-

sliding, even sin did not deter them from beginning again. Neither did the possibility of pain, suffering or loss prevent them from opening their hearts and lives to others – to their brothers and sisters. They had come to know Christ Jesus; to welcome His love and allow it to transform their minds and hearts; to embrace His will for their lives; and to entrust themselves wholly and entirely to Him, from whom they had received life, in whom was their joy and unsurpassing happiness. Heaven is filled with these people, who are our true guides while we make our way through this life, and by virtue of our Baptism we are one with them: intimately connected to them through Christ; they are with us and their words to us are of encouragement, of perseverance and of confidence in God. They are enjoying what we long for here: companionship in solitude; unconditional love and acceptance. They bear witness to all that Jesus promised, and they invite us to accept, courageously, all that He has in His heart for us ... and to make His promise all the more known.

May all the saints in heaven inspire us, and intercede for us in this month, to continue the task they fulfilled in their own lives. May we stand for God, as they did, with faith and trust and love.

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