
« MORE THAN A DAY OF REMEMBRANCE »



November is truly a special month of the year. Beginning with All Saints Day on November 1 and All Souls Day, November 2, we quickly move on to Remembrance Day, November 11. These would be great opportunities for us to really experience some of the vital points of our Creed.

« I BELIEVE IN THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS. »

If there is one article of faith that is a great stimulus in our daily living, it is certainly this basic belief : "I believe in the communion of saints." In these words we proclaim that we are intimately bound with our departed brothers and sisters, as well as with all who share in our human condition. This is part of the great mystery of the Church covering us. Sharing the same human roots, we belong to the same race, but through baptism we are mysteriously but most certainly united to all the members of the Body of Christ, past, present, and future.

BEYOND SPACE

On July 28 we were nearly 800,000 at Downsview Park in Toronto, for the closing Mass of the 2002 World Youth Day. However, because of radio, television, and the internet, we were in communion with millions of people around the globe. But bonds no longer virtual but very real united us to all the believers who shared a common faith and a common prayer. We were truly united to the brothers and sisters from the poorest village and the greatest cathedrals, or at home as a family, all celebrating their faith in the Risen Jesus. Wherever the place of our commitment or prayer, we are all part of the same network of faith, hope, and charity! No person is an island, it is as part of an exceptional network that we live and act and have our being. This feeling of solidarity or, rather, this certainty of communion is bearer of great hope: we are no longer alone, but are part of a well equipped "gang"!

BEYOND TIME

This communion has repercussions in our usual beliefs concerning the departed. As the eucharistic prayer for the dead says it so well, life is not destroyed for those who believe in Christ, it is transformed, and when life on earth is ended there is eternal life in heaven. I remember warmly words I recently heard in a funeral home : "Mom who has left us is our connection to heaven!" and, "My father learned what earthly suffering was like, and hence he was better able to understand all the suffering people in our milieu." The liturgy is bold in its expression, it even proclaims : "Eternal Father, you continuously revive the strength of your Church through the faithful witness of your saints, and in this way you show us your love. We give you thanks, because their witness stimulates us, and their fraternal prayer helps us work for the coming of your kingdom." Let us not fear our departed friends, parents and grandparents, let us not be afraid to address those who have gone before us in peace. These giants of the faith can still give life to humankind. As for me, I often pray to my parents; if they led me to daily knowledge of the Lord Jesus, more than ever can they lead me to more permanent encounters with God.

« TODAY YOU SHALL BE WITH ME... »

On October 20, with my brother bishops I visited the city of Kingston, Ontario. After a meeting with cadets at the Royal Military College, we visited one of the eight penitentiaries in the city... and the building next to one of them is the “church of the Good Thief”... something truly unique in our country and in others as well. The guide pointed this out to us.¹ If we said “the church of the good ‘voleur’ [that is, ‘thief’], we would soon know whom we are dealing with, but the word “larron” does not evoke the same sordidness or repugnance which a criminal often arouses in us. In English, we say “the church of the Good Thief.” Still, it was to this thief that the Lord promised the best communion of all. Saint Mark the Evangelist, after noting the attitude and insults of the first thief, records the words of the other one: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” To which Jesus answered, from the depth of his suffering, “Truly I tell you, today you shall be with me in paradise.” And the guide reminded us that the thief was the only person “beatified” while still on earth!... probably forgetting all those whom the Lord had called blessed...

THE BLESSED OF DAILY ROUTINE

If the singer Gilles Vigneault is fond of singing about our people, if singer Jean-Pierre Ferland has sung the praises of the “Immortals,” if singer Claude Dubois is fond of calling himself a very ordinary person, priest-singer Robert Lebel sings of all the blessed we happily rub shoulders with. Recalling his own father, he writes: “They are many, the blessed we never heard of and who haven’t left any image of themselves as being holy. All those who through the ages have loved without cease and to the best of their ability their brothers and sisters as well as their God! Eternally happy! Everlastingly happy, in His Kingdom! Those about whom we say nothing, these blessed of the humble class, who performed no miracle... Those who have never experienced ecstasy and who left nothing behind but a piece of land or a cradle... They are many, these people of nothing, these blessed of the daily routine, who will not be part of history. Those who have toiled without glory and whose hands became worn by years of toil and labour... Their names are carved on countless stones and sometimes in our prayers, but they are in the heart of God! And when one of them leaves the earth for the Father’s house, a star is born in the heavens... Eternally happy! Everlastingly happy! In His Kingdom!” May this communion of love and goodness continue to grow on, earth. More than a memory, a remembrance, may November truly be a month of intense communion!

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1. In French we do not say “le bon voleur”, the good thief, but “le bon larron”, the word “larron” having passed out of the modern French vocabulary as a synonym for “thief”; hence the church in French is known as the “church of the good ‘larron’,” and the tourist guide’s comment. (Fr. Léo)