

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on All Saints' Day
November 1, 2020

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All Saints' Day has been described as a twenty-four hour day-long breath of Heaven. One day each year in our Church calendar recalls in liturgy a chief characteristic of the Holy Church of Christ. In the words of the Apostles' Creed we profess "I believe in the communion of saints." This essential quality of the Church is mentioned in passing at every Mass when the priest says: "Therefore with angels and archangels and all the company of Heaven."

This communion of saints is *all the members of the Church*, whether on earth, in Purgatory, or in Heaven. Their fellowship with one another is by virtue of being one Body in Christ Jesus. And this is the logical outcome of the fact God's relationship with souls is *enduring*. Physical death cannot stop the Divine decree. Our Blessed Lord Jesus wants us to know that. In His Parable of Dives and Lazarus, the rich man, even in Hades, can think about, care for, and pray for, his family on earth. The Lord assures us *all departed souls* are aware of us still.

There is that wonderful passage in *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, where the writer records all the heroic deeds of the holy men and women of old. He goes on to tell us these heroes are still near us, all around us, watching how we run the race, and sympathizing with us who are assaulted in the same ways as once they were. The *Hebrews* passage calls to mind one of those old Roman amphitheaters, the ruins of which are often pictured on travel brochures. And there they are, the Saints of God, crowded on the benches in those curved tiers rising above the performance level. These holy souls, of the just-made-perfect through the Blood of the Lamb, are watching with interest our conflict with the forces of evil.

The saints not only watch. *They are involved*. They pray for us fervently, for "the prayer of a righteous man availeth much" and they urge us on to more strenuous effort. You and I here are the tip of the iceberg. We, and the whole Church Militant here on earth, are on the performance stage, as it were. The audience is the finest ever assembled. It contains the aristocracy of the universe. And so the Feast of All Saints' is a great encouragement to us.

But it also gives us a sobering thought. Just what sort of performance are we giving? What can be said of our prayers, our communions, our battles against the

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sins which afflict us? What can be said of our witness for Christ, in our homes, community, and work place? In the audience the Truth, which is Christ, is a *reality*, not a profession. Is that also true for us?

In a collection of essays called *The Other Side of the Hill* is the story of an old cricket player and his young son. The old man has been a champion in his day, but then in midlife had become blind. His son also became a star player, and he would lead his father to the matches. The blind old man could hear the cheering, but he just could never get excited about it. Then the father died. The team thought its star player would miss the important match on the next Saturday. But not only was he there, he played better than ever. Afterwards, the team members all wondered how it could be, with his father so recently dead. The answer was “How could I help it? It was the first time my father ever saw me bat.” Life is enriched, not diminished, on *The Other Side of the Hill*.

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.”