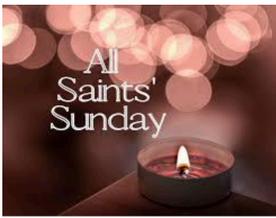


Sunday November 2, 2025

All Saints Sunday

As we observe All Saints Day, I came across a story last week of a man who was declared as saint way back in 1982. Doesn't seem too far away, does it? And it was a story that moved me very deeply. Who here knows Maximilian Kolbe. Anybody? Anybody know that name? That maybe, right? Maybe. While here's the story about his heroic deeds that brought light into a very dark time and speaks to us even to this day. Here's what happened. Back in 1941, in the living nightmare of Auschwitz concentration camp, a prisoner escaped, and the Nazis were furious, and their twisted rule was simple. For every escape, ten random men would be locked in a starvation bunker to die slowly. It was their way of crushing any thoughts of trying to escape to freedom. The name of a man named Gajowniczek was called out, and he broke down and cried out my wife and my children, knowing he would never see them again. But then in the sea of all these starving prisoners, another man stepped forward. He said, very simply, "I'm a Catholic priest and I have no family. Let me take his place." That was Maximilian Kolbe, and he had just made a choice that would echo down to the generations. Before the war, Kolbe was a Franciscan friar, a scholar, a writer, a man who dedicated his life to calmness. When the Nazis invaded Poland in 1939, he didn't hide. He sheltered Jews, Jewish refugees in his monastery. He kept printing newspapers that, in the truth, when the truth was dangerous to say. And for that courage, the Gestapo arrested him in 1941 and sent into Auschwitz. Even there, a place that stripped away humanity, he became a quiet light. He shared his rations, he whispered prayers, he comforted the broken, and when that moment came, he offered his life. And you know what, the guards allowed the exchange. And Kolbe and nine others were sealed in that bunker. A windowless cell, they would die of hunger and thirst. So, for two agonizing weeks, Kolbe held on as one by one, the other men died. But he didn't despair. He prayed. He sang hymns. He held their dying hands and reminded them that they weren't alone. On August 14, 1941, impatient to just have it over with and empty the bunker, the guards injected him with carbolic acid and he died with his arms outstretched, peaceful to the end. But Francis Gajowniczek, he survived. He survived Auschwitz in the war. He went home to his wife and his children. And for 52 more years until his death in 1995, he told



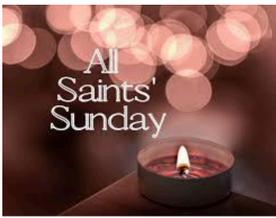
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Kolbe's story to anyone who had listened so that the world would not forget this man. And in 1982, Pope John called the second mate Kolbe calling him a martyr for charity.

According to the Bible, a saint is someone who is sacred, holy, pure, blameless, dedicated. Because you see, the word holy means set apart. And it means for us, set apart to serve God and our neighbor day in and day out. We are all set apart to serve God and our neighbor in our own unique ways. Whatever gifts we have been given with whatever resources available to us. In church and at our job sites and in our homes and neighborhoods and out in the world. We don't have to do, we're not all called to the adversely, to the kinds of heroics that Kolbe did, dying for others. But every day, we face the opportunity to die this selfishness and to live for freedom and do those little unseen heroic acts of sacrifice and love. St. Teresa of Calcutta called it doing small things with great love, just small things with great love, to be lights in the midst of darkness. A saint is anyone who responds to the love of God. And that means we are all saints. There are 69 times when saints are referred to in the Bible. And interestingly, not a single individual person is called a saint. That's because in the Bible, the word saint never refers in the singular. It is always plural. That means we cannot become saints on our own and by our own volition. We need others to help us become saints and other Christians to help us be saints. Saints, in that way, learn the nitty gritty day in and day out life of the kingdom values as Jesus shared for us in the Beatitudes today. How do we to be present into the needs of the world to give generously and act prophetically even when it is difficult and convenient, dangerous or hard. Saints learn to sacrifice from that place of compassion that we all have that grows as we follow Jesus and obey his words.

I think most of us know such people in our lives. If we had not, we wouldn't be here this morning. Most of us were given our first glimpse of Jesus through one of his saints, known or unknown. Maybe for you or me, it was a mother or father, a grandparent. Maybe it was a neighbor, a schoolteacher, a



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friend. Think about it. Maybe it was a pastor or a member of a church or fellowship that we were raised in, a Sunday schoolteacher. Whoever it was, there was something about them, something that separated them from all the rest of the crowd and that was special and intrigued us and caused us to want to be, had that special thing as well. There are people that will go, that we know, that will go the extra mile for anyone. The people that we could count on no matter what, the people that made us feel loved and cared for. They gave us that glimpse of the divine and over time, as we followed their footsteps, we became like them.

So, who are your saints that you can look up to? Who inspires you to be your best? Through whom do you see the light of God shine? Think of all the ordinary people around us, obedient to the ordinary calls of their lives. They are the first actual Bible that we really, really get to read, right? So, who are the saints who have touched your life with the incredible love of Christ? Maybe they are still alive. Maybe they have gone on to glory. Maybe they are members of this very congregation. But today is the day we remember them and we thank them. Not all of us are called to make, as we said, the sacrifice of a Maximilian Kolbe. But we are called to be saints. Like Kolbe, we live in challenging, dangerous and even perilous times. Like Kolbe, we are called to speak the truth when the truth is dangerous. And like Kolbe, we are called to shelter and help people who are in danger. Like Kolbe, we are called to share our bread with others who have less, as we see how millions of Americans are now on the verge of losing their Snap benefits. And we are called to feed them. Like Kolbe, we are called to hold the hand of anyone who is ill or dying. And like Kolbe teaches, his life teaches, we too can live compassionately in harsh and cruel days. And through acts such as these, we are all becoming saints. People dedicated to God and each other. So, may the light of Christ shine through us as the light shined through Kolbe in those dark days of Auschwitz. And may that light of our words and our actions bring hope to God's children and remind them that they are not alone and that we together are saints of God. Amen.