



# The Holy See

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## SOLEMNITY OF ALL SAINTS

### *HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II*

*Wednesday 1 November 2000*

1. "Praise and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving and honour, power and might, to our God for ever and ever" (*Rv 7: 12*). In a spirit of profound adoration of the Most Holy Trinity, we join all the saints who eternally celebrate the heavenly liturgy, to offer thanks again with them to our God for the wonders he has accomplished in the history of salvation.

*Praise and thanksgiving to God* for having raised up in the Church a great multitude of saints, whom no one could count (cf. *Rv 7: 9*). *A great multitude*: not only the saints and blessed we honour during the liturgical year, but also the *anonymous* saints known only to him. Mothers and fathers of families, who in their daily devotion to their children made an effective contribution to the Church's growth and to the building of society; priests, sisters and lay people who, like candles lit before the altar of the Lord, were consumed in offering material and spiritual aid to their neighbour in need; men and women missionaries, who left everything to bring the Gospel message to every part of the world. And the list could go on.

2. *Praise and thanksgiving to God*, particularly *for the holiest of creatures, Mary*, beloved of the Father, blessed because of Jesus, the fruit of her womb, sanctified and made a new creation by the Holy Spirit. A model of holiness for having put her own life at the disposal of the Most High, she "shines forth on earth as a sign of certain hope and comfort to the pilgrim People of God" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 68).

Today is exactly the 50th anniversary of the solemn act by which my revered predecessor Pope Pius XII, in this very square, defined the dogma of Mary's Assumption body and soul into heaven. We praise the Lord for having glorified his Mother by associating her with his victory over sin and death.

Today *the faithful of Pompei* have wanted in a special way to join in our praise. They have come on pilgrimage in large numbers, led by Archbishop Francesco Saverio Toppi, the shrine's Prelate, and accompanied by the city's mayor. Their presence recalls that it was Bl. Bartolo Longo, founder of the new Pompei, who in 1900 began the popular movement for the dogmatic definition of the Assumption.

3. *Today's liturgy speaks completely of holiness*. But to know what is the way to holiness, we must go with the Apostles

up the mount of the Beatitudes to draw near to Jesus and listen to the words of life that come from his lips. Today too he says to us again:

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!* The divine Teacher proclaims "blessed" and, we could say, "canonizes" first of all the poor in spirit, that is, those whose heart is free of prejudices and conditionings, and who are therefore totally disposed to the divine will. Their total and trusting fidelity to God presupposes renunciation and consistent self-detachment.

*Blessed are those who mourn!* This is the blessedness not only of those who suffer from the many misfortunes that belong to the mortal human condition, but also those who courageously accept the sufferings that result from the sincere profession of Gospel morality.

*Blessed are the pure in heart!* He proclaims blessed those who are not content with outward or ritual purity, but seek that absolute inner rectitude which excludes all deceit and duplicity.

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness!* Human righteousness is already a very lofty goal, which ennobles the heart of whoever pursues it, but Jesus is thinking of that greater righteousness which lies in seeking God's saving will: blessed above all are those who hunger and thirst for this righteousness. For Jesus says: "He who does the will of my Father who is in heaven shall enter the kingdom of heaven" (*Mt 7: 21*).

*Blessed are the merciful!* Happy are those who overcome their hardness of heart and indifference, to recognize in practice the primacy of compassionate love, following the example of the Good Samaritan and, in the last analysis, of the Father "rich in mercy" (*Eph 2: 4*).

*Blessed are the peacemakers!* Peace, the sum of all messianic blessings, is a demanding task. In a world marked by tremendous antagonisms and barriers, fraternal harmony inspired by love and sharing must be promoted by overcoming hostilities and conflicts. Blessed are those who dedicate themselves to this most noble endeavour!

4. The saints took these words of Jesus seriously. They believed that they would find "happiness" by putting them into practice in their lives. And they realized their truth in everyday experience: despite their trials, moments of darkness and failures, they already tasted here below the deep joy of communion with Christ. In him they discovered the initial seed, already present in time, of the future glory of God's kingdom.

This was discovered in particular by Mary Most Holy, who lived in unique communion with the incarnate Word, entrusting herself unreservedly to his saving plan. For this reason she was granted to hear, in anticipation of the "Sermon on the Mount", *the Beatitude that sums up all the rest: "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord"* (*Lk 1: 45*).

5. The depth of the Blessed Virgin's faith in God's word appears clearly in the song of the *Magnificat: "My soul magnifies the Lord, / and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, / for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden"* (*Lk 1: 46-48*).

In this song Mary shows what constituted the foundation of her holiness: *deep humility*. We might ask ourselves in what did her humility consist. Much is said to us by the "trouble" she felt at the Angel's greeting: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (Lk 1: 28). Before the mystery of grace, the experience of a particular presence of God who has rested his gaze upon her, Mary feels a natural impulse of humility (literally, of "abasement"). It is the reaction of someone who is fully aware of her own littleness before the greatness of God. In the truth Mary beholds herself, others and the world.

Was not the sign of humility the question: "How can this be, since I have no husband?" (Lk 1: 34). She had just heard that she was to conceive and bear a child, who would reign on the throne of David as the Son of the Most High. Certainly, she did not fully understand the mystery of that divine plan, but she realized that it meant a total change in the reality of her life. However, she did not ask: will this really happen? must this happen? She simply said: how can this be? With no doubts or reservations, she accepted the divine intervention that changed her life. The question expressed the *humility of faith*, the willingness to put one's life at the service of the divine mystery, without being able to understand how it would come about.

This humility of spirit, this complete submission in faith, is particularly expressed in her "*fiat*": "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1: 38). Because of Mary's humility, what she would later sing in the *Magnificat* could be fulfilled: "Henceforth all generations will call me blessed; / for he who is mighty has done great things for me, / and holy is his name" (Lk 1: 48-49).

*The greatness of the gift corresponds to the depth of the humility.* He who is mighty did "great things" for her (cf. Lk 1: 49), and she knew how to accept them with gratitude and to hand them on to all generations of believers. This is the way to heaven followed by Mary, Mother of the Saviour, who goes ahead of all the Church's saints and blessed on this path.

6. *Blessed are you, Mary, assumed body and soul into heaven!* Pius XII defined this truth "for the glory of almighty God ..., for the honour of his Son, the immortal King of the ages and the Victor over sin and death, for the greater glory of his Mother and for the joy and exultation of the entire Church" (Ap. Const. *Munificentissimus Deus*, AAS 42 [1950], 770).

And we exult, O Mary Assumed into Heaven, as we contemplate you who have been glorified and, in the risen Christ, have become the co-worker of the Holy Spirit in communicating divine life to mankind. In you we see the goal of holiness to which God calls all the Church's members. In your life we recognize the clear sign of the path to spiritual maturity and Christian holiness.

*With you and with all the saints* we glorify God the Trinity, who sustains our earthly pilgrimage and lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.