

All Saint's Day – November 1st, 2019 – by Sr. Glenna Czachor

Buon Giorno Buona Gente! Good Morning Good People. May the Lord give you peace. On this feast of all our saints, I greet you with these words of our patron saint...St. Francis, as this was how he greeted the people he was preaching to.

A non-Catholic friend recently asked me – *what is it about the saints, and why do Catholics pray to them? Why don't you just pray to God?*

I assured him that we do not deify the saints – but rather – they are the women and men who encourage us – whose stories inspire and whose wisdom brings us insight...

all for the purpose of enriching our faith life and bringing us closer to God.

We talk about having “patron” saints.

We think about the unique qualities of a particular saint, and the circumstances of their lives, and we make a personal connection to them.

We find comfort and solace in knowing that we aren't the only ones to have faced certain difficulties or challenges.

There are the popular saints like St. Anthony who helps us find lost things; St. Joseph who helps us sell our homes; and when all else fails, we pray to St. Jude patron saint of lost causes.

There are patron saints for every profession and avocation...

such as St. Martha, patron of homemakers; St. Cecilia, patron of musicians; and St. Anne patron of mothers and children.

Countries and continents have their own patron saints...St. Joan of Arc for France; St. Patrick for Ireland, and St. Rose of Lima for South America, to name just a few.

There are saints for every occasion and obscure cause – such as St. Genesius patron saint of actors and comedians; St. Gabriel, patron saint of television and radio broadcasters; St. Raphael, patron saint of nurses; and St. Lawrence patron saint of chefs and cooks....

I could go on and on... but you get my point –

there are thousands of official patron saints in the Canons of the Catholic Church.

But let us not forget the millions upon millions of saints with a small “S”

Those whom we call the Communion of Saints – all the holy women and men

as the reading from Revelations describes them ...

“the great multitude” – the ones who have gone before us, led the way, The ones who have survived times of great distress. (ref: REV 7)

Holy ones like our own Mother Clara Pfaender, founder of the Congregation of Franciscan Sisters, Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, of which the Wheaton Franciscans are a part.

We recall fondly the five sisters of our congregation who perished in the Wreck of the Deutschland on their way to America.

We celebrate the Venerable Mary Ward, founder of the Congregation of Jesus and the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which we also know as the Sisters of Loreto.

And we remember with love and joy our family and friends, our loved ones who have passed from this life...whose photos we have placed here in this chapel.

We join all these holy people, and the angels of God and exclaim,
“Amen! Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving, honor, power and might be to our God, forever and ever. Amen” (ref: REV 7)

Now to help us further as we explore the importance of the saints in our lives, I have brought with me today a somewhat ancient piece of technology. I am sure most of you are familiar with it and have used one in the past – but it’s fallen out of use today – replaced by modern technology – it is – A MAP

I have been thinking about maps a lot lately – the idea came to me a few weeks ago when I was with my two nephews John and Jeff. Jeff was extolling the virtues of GPS and his continual amazement at how we can navigate journeys from our phone or directly on the dashboard of our cars. John the more nostalgic of the two, was bemoaning the loss of “good old fashioned” paper maps.

This conversation led me to a reflection on maps, map-making and map-makers.

Before this map could be drawn, printed and set out in a rack at the rest area on Route 39 where I picked it up... someone ...or some people – had to set-out to create it.

Sometime ago – there was no map. There were no roads – there was just open Illinois prairie land. Then people moved in – towns grew up – roads were built – and along the way, someone charted these roads onto paper. Not only for their own sake however...because ultimately, the purpose of a map is to put down information for other people – to help guide those who will come later, to help **them** find **their** way.

These map-makers are the ones who have gone before us – into unknown territories – who created or found pathways and chartered them for us.

In the Christian way of life...the Saints – are our Map Makers – They followed the way of Christ – because

*They are the poor in spirit,
They are the ones who mourned,
They are the meek and merciful,
They are the ones who hungered and thirsted for righteousness,
They are the peacemakers. (ref: Matt 5)*

They created pathways and charted guide-posts for us...not for us to walk exactly as they did – but to use their lives as a guide to our own Christian life. They help us chart our own pathways of discovery.

We are God's children, and what we shall be has not yet been revealed – (ref: 1John3) so the writer John says, but we have been given a way of life, and companions for our journey. We take our maps and chart our own courses.

It's said, in ancient times, the mapmakers would get to the end of chartered waters and write, "beyond this place there would be dragons." The unknown areas of the world were perceived as dark and dangerous.

And yet...at some point, some voyager found the courage to venture on beyond the chartered courses, to discover new places and new lands, and created new pathways and new charts.

Sr. Magdalena reminded us yesterday about our own history, and the early sisters who voyaged into the unknown...

" those first sisters from their German homeland, their oppressed church and their beloved community. With a courageous YES, they ventured to a new beginning - without knowing what to expect in this new world; and with the knowledge that there was no turning back. Like M. Clara, they offered their concrete services of love to the needy. Praying and trusting, sensitive and committed, they planted our Franciscan charism in the American earth. "

We too are called to move beyond comfortable boundaries. We've done it before – and we will do it again. We face new ideas, new ways of creating community, fresh expressions of our charism. We ask ourselves "what is ours to do?" We pray, we discern, we chart a new course together.

Sr. Magdalena affirmed to us yesterday,
"This is your grown identity as Wheaton Franciscans within our Congregation. It consists of listening, praying, contemplative discernment, creative design and concrete shapes with trust in God, daring and mutual support. "

Earlier this week, on the Feast of the Founding of our Congregation, Sr. Melanie challenged us to

"follow in faithfulness the foundation our foundress laid out for us, living our charism of love. Let us live into the life God offers us, now, knowing that those sisters who came before us did the same.

Let us remember our ability to meet the needs of the times in new ways.

Let us be courageous and hopeful to take the next steps together as we: Forge foundations without forgetting our foundress. "

Throughout our history, We face what life presents, and return only blessing.

I recently learned something new and beautiful from my friend Mimi who is Jewish. She told me that the Hebrew word for blessing – “baruch” is related to the Hebrew word for choice - “bechar” / Blessing is related to choice.

Ponder that for a moment – our Blessings – are related - to our choices...

The abundance of blessings in our lives – are based on our choices.

What we name as a blessing – is our choice...

The notion that we have choices – that God has granted us free will – is itself, one of the greatest blessings.

Whom we love and share our lives with – is a choice.

How we spend our time and energy in service to others – is a choice.

How we face the challenges in our lives – is a choice.

As I pondered this connection between blessing and choice – the depth of insights and grace was overwhelming. And I hope for you as well...

So, I was challenged by the Gospel reading – and offer this adaptation to you as my last bit of sharing...

Choose to be poor in spirit, and the Kingdom of heaven will be yours.

Choose to mourn, and you will be comforted.

Choose to be meek, and you will inherit the land.

Choose to hunger and thirst for righteousness, and you will be satisfied.

Choose to be merciful, and will be shown mercy.

Choose to be clean of heart, and you will see God.

Choose to be a peacemaker, and you will be called a child of God.

Choose to be persecuted for the sake of righteousness, and the Kingdom of heaven shall be yours.

Choose to be insulted and persecuted for the sake of the Gospel...

then you can

Rejoice and be glad...for your reward will be great in heaven. (ref: Matt 5)

My friends, it is by the choices we make in our lives

that we find abundant blessings

and one day, we too will join in the great Communion of Saints.

May the Lord give you peace.

(Reading references:
Rev 7: 2-4; 9-14; 1 John 3: 1-3; Matt 5: 1-12a)