

# FROM THE PASTOR'S



31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, November 5, 2006 B

## REMEMBERING LOVED ONES WHO HAVE GONE HOME TO THE LORD

This past Wednesday, November 1st, was the Feast of All Saints and November 2nd, the Feast of All Souls. Today at all the Masses we remember loved ones of many parishioners who died since last November. We also prayed for all who are grieving a loss.

Since the founding of our parish many wonderful people have gone home to the Lord, people who gave generously of their time, treasure and talent to the building up of our parish community. I remember these brothers and sisters every time I pray the *second Glorious Mystery* of the Rosary—the Ascension. I also include in that decade all who continue to give of their time, treasure and talent.

On November the 1st, our church remembers ALL Saints—canonized and un canonized. Every parish is blessed with saintly people and Ascension is no exception. Some of Ascension's saintly people have gone home to the Lord. Some continue to minister in our midst.

The November issue of U.S. Catholic had a beautiful article called *Saints and Us* by Jay Cormier. In the article, Jay gave five examples of saintly people. As you read the following, you will probably be reminded of men and women in your own family and in our church family who are also saintly people.

### Let us all rejoice in the Lord and keep festival in honor of Ralph.

*Ralph was a loving husband and terrific father. At one point he was working three jobs to put his four children through school. Education was everything, he told his kids—and as if to drive the point home, he managed to complete his own college degree, going to class nights and weekends. For eight years he cared for his beloved Ida, his wife of 48 years, who slipped away from him bit by bit. “Dad, how can you put yourself through this?” his kids would ask. He would smile and shrug, “Hey, when you love someone, when you really love someone, it’s easy.” It wasn’t easy—but Ralph made it look easy. Ralph and Ida are now together again at the great wedding feast of heaven. Happy feast day, Ralph and Ida.*

### Let us rejoice in the Lord and keep festival in honor of Father Hugh.

*For 65 years, Hugh served his brother Trappists in every way possible: as a lowly novice and seminarian, as*

*a priest and confessor, as a teacher and prior, as a retreat master, and as abbot of the community. Even into his 90's, Father Hugh would help out whenever and wherever he could: greeting visitors in the gift shop, caring for the plants in the chapel, peeling potatoes for dinner. Every brother will tell you that whatever Hugh took on, he did so with the peace and joy, the dedication and humility, that can only be of God. By the simplicity and integrity of his life, his community knew a saint lived in their midst. This November 1, give thanks to God for the saints who have touched your life.*

### Let us all rejoice in the Lord and keep festival in honor of Mary.

*By any definition Mary was the mother foundress of the parish. When she teamed up with Father Tom to organize the new parish, Mary brought a mother's laser-like focus to the task at hand and the street-smarts to make it happen. Officially she was the first “parish secretary”; in fact, she was the prime force behind everything from the lector's schedule to the building fund. Soon she took on the fledgling religious education program as well. The formal theological education she lacked was more than offset by her unparalleled skill with the “practical theology” of compassion, dedication, and an indefatigable sense of humor.*

*When her cancer was first diagnosed, Mary treated it as an inconvenience—she conceded a couple of rounds of chemotherapy and radiation, but it was soon business as usual. But a recurrence a few years later forced Mary to give up the work she loved. That's when the parish community truly shined brightest. Parishioners took turns bringing supper to Mary, Ken, and their four children. Transportation to and from the doctor's office was covered. And everyone made sure that Mary and Ken's kids didn't miss a beat of their teenage years. It was all done without fanfare, any great summons to action, or master scheduling. In her last months, Mary discovered how good a parish she had built. Keep the feast of Mary and her company on November 1.*

### Let us rejoice in the Lord and keep festival in honor of Mrs. G.

*When you talk about gifted teachers, Mrs. G was the genuine article. Her ability to open up her first-graders' minds to the excitement of forming words out of letters and using numbers to compute was magic. Mrs. G.'s students loved to learn—and they took that love of*

*learning into high school and college and grad school and careers in medicine, education, the arts, and business. Her students—and her student’s children and their children, too—remember the Friday story-and-popcorn hour, Scooter the Hamster (and Scooter’s many successors over the years), the weekly math races and spelling derbies, and the bulletin board in Mrs. G.’s classroom that was always engaging, fascinating, and fun. But what they all cherish the most is the memory of Mrs. G. herself, a woman of great love, warmth, and caring. This All Saints’ Day offer a prayer of thanks for the Mrs. G. in your life.*

**Let us all rejoice in the Lord and keep festival in honor of Steve.**

*Steve always wanted to be a fireman. As a kid he was a fixture at the neighborhood fire station. Sometimes the crew would let him put on a pair of the big black boots and help them wash the ladder truck. Little Stevie was thrilled to be one of the guys. After graduating from high school, he distinguished himself in the firefighter training program and became one of the guys. Steve was a firefighter’s firefighter who took the work but not himself seriously, whose natural kindness and no-nonsense approach to the work won the confidence of his peers and the respect of the rookies. So it surprised nobody when Steve ran into that burning warehouse looking for trapped workers. The workers all made it out Steve didn’t. But you do what you have to do, as Steve always said. His wife and three kids miss him terribly—but know that Steve continues to look to look out for them from his place in the company of saints. This All Saint’s Day remember Steve and the men and women like him who gave it their all for their brothers and sisters.*

*Let us all rejoice in the Lord and keep festival in honor of Ralph and Mrs. G. and Father Hugh and Steve and Mary and Lois and Rich and Sister Romana and Teresita and Calvin and the endless litany of saints who have walked among us.*

*Let us all rejoice in the Lord and keep festival in honor of those who gave their lives for others, who taught us the wonders of life through their brave struggle to live, who died for the cause of justice, who left no other mark on the world than their love of God and their love for others.*

*Let us all rejoice in the Lord and keep festival in honor of the Peters and Paul’s and Andrews, the Benedicts and Francisces, the Scholasticas and Clare’s, the Peter Clavers and the Roses, the Dorothy Days and Thomas Merton’s, the Mother Teresas and Katharine Drexel’s, the martyrs and confessors in our midst.*

*With all the saints and angels, let us join in joyful praise to the Son of God.*

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All Saints Day reminds us of our *call to holiness*. Someone once said that they only real failure in life is the failure to be a saint. We tend to associate holiness and saintliness with clergy and religious because the vast majority of our *canonized* saints are popes, bishops, priests and religious brothers and sisters. A big reason for this is that these holy men and women belonged to religious orders who were in a very good position to *promote their cause* for canonization. Most likely all of us would agree that all five people mentioned are saint material—but they have no promoters of their cause, except perhaps for Fr. Hugh.

**The Path to Holiness and True Happiness are the same**

Every baptized person is called to a life of holiness. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaking to all present (not just to the Apostles) said: “be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”. Some commentators translate this verse to mean “be ye *holy* as God is holy” or ‘be ye *whole* as God is whole.’ For Thomas Merton to be a saint meant to be himself. I am very much attracted to that definition of saintliness or holiness. I am not called to be like anyone else. Rather, I am called to *discover* and *become* the person God called me to be. When I am operating out of my *true* self (as opposed to my *false* self), I am glorifying God in the best possible way that *I* can. Also *the key* to *true* happiness is being one *true* self.

In our commercialist society, we are all too easily led to believe that *happiness* is connected with the acquiring of more and more stuff and going to exotic places or having a particular relationship. Almost 1,400 years ago, St. Augustine told us that the ‘heart of man was made for God, and it is restless until it rests in him.’ Augustine knew what he was talking about because for about 35 years he looked for happiness, and fulfillment in everything worldly but none satisfied the deepest yearnings of his heart.

**The Saints Guide to Happiness**

Presently, I am reading a spiritual book called *The Saints Guide to Happiness* by Robert Ellsberg. It is one of the best spiritual books I have read in years. Ellsberg became Catholic after working with a modern day saint for five years—Dorothy Day. Dorothy ministered to homeless people for about 50 years in Lower Manhattan. After studying theology at Harvard Divinity School, he became Editor in Chief of Orbis books, the publishing arm of Maryknoll Missionaries. He is married with three children. I mention all of the above so that you have a sense of the lens or experience through which he wrote

this book. The titles of the eight chapters are:

- Learning To Be Alive
- Learning To Let Go
- Learning To Work
- Learning To Sit Still
- Learning to Love
- Learning To Suffer
- Learning To Die
- Learning To See

As Ellsberg reflects on each of the above themes, he draws on insights from saints canonized and uncanonized ancient one like the Desert Fathers and contemporary ones like Thomas Merton, Flannery O'Connor, Dorothy Day, Gerard Manley Hopkins.

One of my favorite chapters thus far is his one on *work*. Studying the lives of holy people have taught Ellsberg that *prayer, work and happiness* are interconnected. Quoting Brother Lawrence's spiritual classic *Practicing the Presence of God*, Ellsberg writes:

*"The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while other persons are at the same time calling for things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament."*

Brother Lawrence, who spent hours each day working in a monastic kitchen did *not* make a distinction between holy/religious work and secular/worldly work. For Lawrence there is no such thing as 'holy work'. For him, there was no work as long as it is not harmful or dishonest—that cannot be "hallowed", that could not serve as a path to God, a way to happiness.

Surely the above is good news for people who cannot spend hours in prayer each day. On the other hand, we can be sure that Brother Lawrence only found God in the pots and pans because he had spent time contemplating him in prayer. Still it is so important for us who 'live in the world' to keep in mind that our worldly activities can contribute to our sanctification just as much as our time in prayer—as long as they are carried out with a *prayerful or proper disposition of heart*. Next weekend we will have 100 copies of *Saints Guide to Happiness* available outside church. It is also presently available at the parish office. This \$13 book will be sold for \$5.00—a Pastor's discount. I see giving large discounts on books, even to the point of selling them at a loss, as a part of the parish's effort to spiritually enrich the lives of our people. I believe friends of yours, Catholic and non-Catholic, who enjoy

reading good spiritual books will appreciate this book. I should add that this book is definitely not a "six steps to happiness" book. Of this book one reviewer writes: "Neither a quick fix nor a stiff tone, but a modern, refreshing guide to a true life and the kind of happiness that lasts."

### **An Excerpt from statement by Bishops of Florida on upcoming Elections**

Before casting our votes, we must seek to:

- Develop a well-formed conscience shaped by fundamental moral principles;
- Consult and become familiar with the sacred and certain teachings of the Church.
- Seek accurate information on issues that impact human life and promote a just society without relying strictly on campaign advertisements or party affiliation.
- Encourage all candidates to clarify their positions on key issues.
- Actively participate in discussions with others, especially our family and those close to us, by respectfully listening and offering our own insight.
- Seek wisdom through prayer and reflection and rely on the help of the Holy Spirit to guide our voting decisions.

Have a blessed week,

