

All Saints

'My dear people, we are already the children of God but what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed' (1 John 3:2).

Today's Feast of All Saints reminds us that we are all called to be saints, to be like God, to see him as he really is. This may sound daunting, but with God's grace is not impossible. As we give thanks for those who have gone before us, we ask them to help us through their intercession.

Ten years ago Pope Benedict XVI made his visit to Britain. Because the visit was during the school year one of the events of the visit was an Assembly for all Catholic Schools which was broadcast into school halls and classrooms. During that Assembly Pope Benedict addressed our pupils and students in these words:

'There is something that I very much want to say to you. I hope that among those of you listening to me today there are some of the future saints of the twenty first century. What God wants most for all of each one of you is that you should become holy. He loves you much more than you could begin to imagine, and he wants the very best for you. And by far the best thing for you is to grow in holiness'.

You can read the full text at:

http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100917_mondo-educ.html#ADDRESS_OF_THE_HOLY_FATHER_TO_PUPILS

How are we to grow in holiness, to become saints? The first step is to enter into friendship with God. Christian education and formation whether for children or for adults isn't to do with knowing about Jesus but rather entering into a relationship with him. Once we have this experience of friendship with Jesus then our lives begin to change. We try to reflect something of his infinite goodness in our own lives. Pope Benedict speaks at this point of the importance of virtue. He says:

'You begin to feel compassion for people in difficulties and you are eager to do something to help them. You want to come to the aid of the poor and the hungry, you want to comfort the sorrowful, you want to be kind and generous. And once these things begin to matter to you, you are well on the way to becoming saints'.

Virtue is sometimes a difficult idea to understand not least because sometimes in our culture it might have some negative connotations. However at its simplest,

'a virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of themselves. The virtuous person tends towards the good with all their sensory and spiritual powers; they pursue the good and choose it in concrete actions. The goal of the virtuous life is to become like God.' (CCC 1803).

That last sentence should remind us of the reading with which I began this homily in which St John tells us that 'we shall be like him' (1 John 3:2). It is by growing in the virtues that we shall become saints. This involves human effort but above all requires God's grace. However the good news is that this is God's desire and will for us, and he will make it possible if we allow him to guide and lead us. That is what his gift of friendship means.

I wonder if there are people listening to or reading this homily who took part in that school assembly with Pope Benedict ten years ago. Do you remember what he said, did it inspire you at the time, how is it working out now?

Perhaps the rest of us too have reason to reflect and ask ourselves similar questions. We have received the same invitation, the same calling, 'to become saints'. We have been shown a clear path for how we are to achieve this. How are we progressing?

For video version click: <https://youtu.be/rDB8uo-87nl>