20 C

MDP of God

Last Sunday we heard a shortened version of Hebrews 11—that was our 2nd reading

And the reading we read focused almost entirely on Abraham—our father in faith

But if you read all of Hebrews 11 the author speaks of many of the OT heroes—*what we would call saints*

He mentions Abel, Enoch, Noah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Rahab (who had been a foreigner and a harlot, *but who became a hero of the Jewish faith*)

And then it says—and I just love this passage from Hebrews 11, “What more shall I say? I have not time to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, did what was righteous, obtained the promises; they closed the mouths of lions, put out raging fires, escaped the devouring sword; out of weakness they were made powerful, became strong in battle, and turned back foreign invaders… Some were tortured and would not accept deliverance, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others endured mockery, scourging, even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, sawed in two, put to death at sword’s point;… needy, afflicted, tormented.

And then my favorite line of all—and I quote—vs 38 “**The world was not worthy of them”**

And then a few verses later in picks up with today’s 2nd reading, “*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses…*.”

Look around folks—///the author of Hebrews is telling us that the heroes of the faith are not far off unaware of us and indifferent to what is going on in our lives

**No**—*the saints surround us*—they are with us—they are cheering us on—encouraging us to be faithful—encouraging us to love God and our neighbors^^^

In two weeks’ time we’ll still be reading from Hebrews 12 (which is where today’s reading is from)—and we’ll here then who we have drawn close to as Christians—Hebrews tells us and I quote, “No, you have approached Mount Zion
and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,
and countless angels in festal gathering, [*so we’ve drawn close to the angels-it goes on*]
and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, [*that’s the Church on earth—we’ve grown close to each other*]
and God the judge of all,
and the spirits of the just made perfect, [*those are the saints in heaven –who became perfect either in their lives here—or after purgatory when all stain of sin was removed*]
and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant,
and the sprinkled blood that speaks more eloquently than that of Abel.”

So the bible tells us we’ve drawn close—not just to God the Father—not just to Jesus the eternal Son or the Holy Spirit---**No**, *we’ve drawn close to the angels—to the Church on earth—and to saints in heaven*

My friends, this gets to the heart of our Catholic faith—Jesus came into the world not just so we can have a personal relationship with Him—**He came to join us as family**—the Family of God—and God’s family includes all the Church on earth—all the Church in heaven (that is the saints)—and the angels

I point this out because many people don’t understand why we Catholics make such a big deal about the saints—about Mary—about how important it is to be part of the community of faith on the earth

 It’s because *God’s plan is to* **unite us as a family**-*that’s His plan*

 And family’s turn to each other for help

 Family’s support each other in good times and in bad

Family’s care about each other

I’ve mentioned many times how to understand what Jesus came to do—you have to understand the problem—and the problem of course is sin

And the book of Genesis tells us that sin separates us *not only from God*—but it causes divisions among people

We see that when God confronts Adam and Eve and Adam says “the woman” –“the woman You put here God”---*it’s her fault—it’s your fault God-* **it’s not my fault**”

That same message is reinforced in Genesis 11 with the story of the Tower of babel—when we’re told that the whole world spoke one language—*and all of a sudden because of sin*, **they can’t talk to each other**

*They’re divided into people and cultures who don’t understand each other and often don’t like each other*----**sin divides**

 Jesus came to unite us to God **and to one another**

And as our 2nd reading today pointed out--- the unity –the family ties—the oneness that he brings about in us *doesn’t stop when we leave this world and go to heaven*

No—we are surrounded by the saints—they are with us—they care for us—they intercede on our behalf

So why did God make it this way?

Sometimes you’ll hear people say, “Why would you go to the saints –why would you go to Mary—when you can go right to God?

They of course say that with the sacraments as well—why go to confession to a priest? What difference does it make if you come to church—as long as you pray to God?

Well it all goes to God’s plan—*and so much of it stems from who God is*

God has told us that He’s not a solitary individual---*God has revealed to us that He is a community of love*—God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit

And so God made it so that we need each other--- it’s in our neediness that we reach out to one another

If we were all self-sufficient we wouldn’t need each other—*but God made us so that we’re not self-sufficient*

When we’re born into this world—all we can do is eat and cry and mess our diapers—*if we didn’t have others to care for us----***we’d die**

 We wouldn’t survive

From the first moment of our lives God wants us to need others—**why**?

Because He doesn’t want us to be rugged individualist—He wants us to be part of community—He wants us to reach out to each other—He wants us to help each other

 Because it’s in community that we model Him who is a community of love

*And that community doesn’t stop when we die*—those in heaven are part of what theologians refer to as “the Church Triumphant”—we’re part of the church “militant”—and those in purgatory are “the Church suffering” [but it’s one Church]

Our prayers can help the people in purgatory—the prayers of the saints in heaven can help us—and in our prayers we can help each other

We see this idea in the in the bible in the Book of Revelation---In Revelation 5:8 St John sees some of the saints in heaven –and He says, and I quote, “When he took it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each of the elders held a harp and gold bowls filled with incense, *which are the prayers of the holy ones.*

So the image here are the saints in heaven bringing our prayers to the throne of God

 The saints in heaven –interceding for us on earth

We see the same reality with the angels—in Revelation 8:3 it says, and again I quote, “Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a gold censer. He was given a great quantity of incense to offer, *along with the prayers of all the holy ones,* on the gold altar that was before the throne.”

 So we see the angels in heaven bringing our prayers to the altar in heaven

So the angels are interceding for us—the angels care about us

God’s plan in creating us and in saving us is a family plan

That’s why in creating us God made it so that a man and woman join together in the holy sacrament of marriage—and the love that unites them is so real, so strong, so tangible you can name it{name the servers}—*in God’s plan every one of us is meant to be love come to life*

In saving us---again we don’t just have a personal relationship with God—we’re meant in His plan to be born again into His family—into His Church- into the community of faith

Creation and Salvation are both family events-because the family is an image of God

And death in this world isn’t the end of the family relationship—*it’s the fulfillment of those family relationships*

Our loved ones who go before us don’t stop loving us—don’t stop caring for us—don’t stop praying for us---**No**—*we are surrounded by this cloud of witnesses as our 2nd reading today said*

Just as when they die we don’t stop loving them –we don’t stop praying for them –that’s why we offer Masses for our deceased loved ones—that’s why we pray for them---and that’s why we can turn to them for help

My friends, to ignore the saints *is to reject God’s family plan*—to ignore our Blessed Mother *is to reject God’s family plan*

Now, some of our separated brothers and *sisters think it’s terrible that we turn to Mary and the other saints*—and they’ll say things like, “**God is a jealous God**” – “God is angry when you turn to others instead of Him”

And it’s true that the bible says God is a jealous God—*but He’s not jealous of His children*—He’s not jealous of the Mother of His Son---when the bible says that it’s speaking of false gods who St Paul says are in reality demons masquerading as gods

 Let me just end with a little story—true story to make my point

Several years ago I had a wedding—and the ring bearer was a 4 year old boy –who was a really cute kid—and of course he was in a tux which made him look even cuter

Well the ring bearer was the nephew of the bride—and his father was in a band and the father’s band was playing at the wedding reception

When I got to the reception this little four year old was on the stage with his dad and a little guitar—*so he’s playing in the band*

*And the people at the wedding*—especially the ladies **thought this little kid was adorable**---they were taking pictures and pointing at him—and saying, “oh isn’t he sooo cute”

So, I ask you—how do you think the father reacted? Do you think the father got on the microphone and said, “hey folks, I’m the one whose really making the music here?--- Do you think he said to the people—“hey folks you’re focusing on the wrong person here—I’m the one who really matters here?—Do you think he said to his son, “*Hey kid, get out of here you’re taking attention away from me?*

Of course not—the father was beaming because this was his little boy that people were excited about

In fact if any human father reacted negatively—*we’d think he was a real idiot*---**wouldn’t we??????**

And yet my friends, that’s how some Christians think God reacts when we honor the saints---they picture God in heaven saying, “Hey, I’m the only one up here who matters—*don’t give them attention*—**your taking attention that rightly belongs to me away from me”**

Again, if a human father reacted like that we’d think he was an idiot—*that’s not how God reacts*

Just like that father on that stage the night of that wedding—when we turn to the saints—**God is beaming**—*God loves when His children are honored* – **God loves when His younger children turn to His older children for help**

*And God in His great love made it so they can help us* [but to explain that is a much longer homily and I’ve already gone longer than I like-]

So look around—we can’t see them, but we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses-the saints –who love us—who care for us—and who are willing and able to intercede for us any time we ask them for help

My friends—let’s build those family ties—by turning to our Blessed Mother—by turning to the other saints who surround us—and asking for their help