

The Common Good of the Saints – A reflection from the Director of the Diocesan Office for Worship, Aaron Sanders:

“Society is not for [the human person] an extraneous addition but a requirement of his nature” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1879). Hence the good of an individual is not wholly separable from the common good. Nor is the common good a mere aggregation of benefits that remain individualized. Rather, the common good indicates the range of conditions that allow people, whether as groups or individuals, to reach their fulfillment. “Belonging to everyone and to each person, it is and remains ‘common’, because it is indivisible and because only together is it possible to attain it” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* 164).

The highest form of human society is the supernatural community of the Church, whose indivisible good is divinity itself, of which we partake as members of Christ’s Body. Through our mutual connection to Christ, our Head, we are bound so inextricably to one another that “all the goods [the Church] has received necessarily become a common fund” (CCC 947). “If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy” (1 Cor 12:26). Consequently, we are called to “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). We also find that our most powerful action is the communal prayer of the liturgy; “no other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7). Each November, the Church’s liturgy focuses our attention on these communal aspects of life in Christ.

November 1 marks the “solemnity of all the Saints united with Christ in glory,” that by venerating the memory of all citizens of heaven we may be “encouraged by their example, gladdened by their protection and crowned by their victory” (*Roman Martyrology*, Nov. 1, n. 1). While their example and victory are, in one sense, past realities, the ongoing protection of the saints underscores how even the holiness of their earthly lives, gathered together in Christ’s eternal mystery, remains present and available to us today. Indeed, each one of the saints worships with us every time we participate in a liturgical act, accompanying us through-out our pilgrimage toward heaven. Though it may be tempting to highlight the best-known saints as the friends in whose companionship we have rejoiced the most, it is important to remember that one reason for a feast of *all* saints is to ensure that we honor and invoke those holy men and women who do not otherwise receive attention on the calendar – or whose sanctity may be known to God alone.

After seeking aid from heavenly patrons, we take our turn, on Nov. 2, to contribute to the Church’s good, offering up the Eucharist so that God’s “departed servants may be taken up into glory with [his] Son, in whose great mystery of love we are all united” (*Roman Missal*, Nov. 2, n. 1, Prayer over the Offerings). Every priest of the Latin Church is permitted to celebrate Mass three times on this Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed, thereby underscoring the value of offering this sacrifice on behalf of the dead. We may also offer personal sacrifices on this day and throughout the erstwhile octave of All Saints (November 1-8) to obtain plenary indulgences for the faithful departed, directing the Church’s shared “treasury of merit” toward the members most in need. Here again we see that none of us are saved by or for ourselves, but always as members integrated into the whole Christ, so that God may be all in all.