

A friend who I had met in college, just over ten years ago, at that time he had pretty much left the Catholic faith of his childhood behind and he was really living out the college life in every way. But one time he found himself in Church and I found him there as well. So I immediately went up to him and introduced myself to him and we agreed to have lunch and that began our friendship. After a year or two my friend slowly began to come back to the faith. And so it didn't surprise me all that much a few years later after I went to seminary he told me over a late night beer that he thought God was calling him to be a priest as well. I was sure at that point that he was going to make a great priest. Well, three years ago, my friend left the seminary. Seeing as how he did not have a job or any studies to do, he decided to take a little vacation. I was over in Rome in my first years of theology studies, so he came over to visit and we spent a week together. The day he arrived, naturally being in Rome, the pasta capital of the world, I planned to have a great meal together and I was really looking forward to the conversation and seeing him.

But it turned out to be one of the most depressing conversations in my entire life. What I realized was that

my buddy did not only leave the seminary, but he had also left God behind. He was questioning everything from top to bottom, the existence of God, the divinity of Jesus Christ, the Church, the Sacraments, the concept of marriage, the authority of scripture-everything. He was questioning it all. For that next week, naturally we spent a lot of time together as he was doing some sightseeing and we had all sorts of conversations and so often these conversations were very, very frustrating. I realized that no matter what I said I could not convince him of the truth of the faith. I couldn't convince him about God anymore. It was especially frustrating because my friend had already spent time in the seminary for a few years, so he knew the philosophical and theological arguments just as well as I did. He just didn't believe in it anymore. I remember at that point feeling very helpless, somewhat dejected, but I recognized that there was one thing I could still do for my friend, the arguments didn't work anymore, having these long discussions were not the answer. The one thing my friend really needed from me was for me to **become a saint.**

You see, I think the reason he no longer believed is because he did not have enough saints in his life. He did not have enough holy witnesses to the truth. So I pose a question

for you all... **Why do you think it is all true?** That is God, Jesus, sacraments, scripture, tradition. Why do you think it's all true? When I ask myself this question, initially my thoughts go to experiences that I have had in the past. When God has encountered me in a profound way. I think of moments of prayer, I think of moments when the Lord has touched my heart, perhaps times when I have received the Eucharist, moments when I have reached that deep imitate moment with Jesus, or perhaps when I've seen God's province slowly unfold in my life. But after more reflection, after thinking about it a little more, I didn't think that I primarily believe because what God has done in my heart. Conversely, I think the reason that I really believe is because the way I see God's grace transform the lives of other people. Take ordinary people like you and me and making them incredibly holy, making them into saints. You see, it is they who have lived really holy lives that make the faith incredible. It is those that have given everything over to God who have the most unselfish lives, lives that truly radiate with a certain beauty. When I see people like that, when I think of those that have gone before us in heaven, naturally my heart begins to long to be in communion with them. I want to emulate them in every way, I want to follow their example. It is these people who show me that God's grace in all these supernatural truths we talk about are not just abstract ideas but rather these

things have a real effect in the lives of people. And the facts, the results are incredibly beautiful as we see the saints who have lived lives that really attract us back to God.

Today we celebrate the 16th week of Ordinary Time. We just heard, a few moments ago, in Matthew's Gospel how the Twelve, those men who perhaps knew Jesus the best, returned from their first acts of ministry. These men (11 of 12) were saints.

I wonder what is it that attracts us so much to the lives of holy men and women. For one, it is they have given up control of their life, right, they have a humility to hand it all over to God and allow him to direct their lives. These men and women are also very attractive because they are true servants, they do not seek to accumulate things, but they give everything away. When we see someone, who has spent their life pouring themselves out in love we are inspired by that example and we want to follow them.

These past several weeks we have heard about discipleship in the scriptures, we know that Fr. Jeff has made it a point during his tenure here as pastor to cultivate the notion of intentional discipleship and we as a parish are trying to

emulate that the saints were all true servants, following Christ who came not to be served but to serve. The saints are also the ones who have been cleansed by God's mercy. Pope Francis has been speaking a lot about mercy in these last several months. Mercy is a huge, huge, theological concept that is so important for all of us. In the Saints we recognize that they started out like you and me, sinners, struggling in life but who have been cleansed by God's mercy and made holy.

For this reason, in our First Reading from Jeremiah, we heard about the intended ultimate saint, who will come from the line of David, who will be the Messiah. We also heard about the appointment of shepherds whose task would be to help the people and guide the people. In one sense we can say that Jeremiah's words are calling the world to this notion of sainthood. In our Psalm, we sung how the Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing we shall want. The saints have lived their lives fueled by the desire to see God's face in heaven. And that should inspire all of us.

I remember 5 years ago, in the Day Chapel in this Church, on a Tuesday morning, Fr. Bill Griner spoke in his homily

about heaven being the experience of staring at the face of God. Think about that image. You, me, having the opportunity to stare at God. What is perhaps more awesome is the idea that while you are staring at God, God in return is staring at you. It almost gives you chills. The saints are the ones who truly live their baptized nature as sons and daughters of God. St. Paul in the Second Reading makes the comparison that those who are near to God do so by "the blood of Christ." We can say that this is the Saints, they are people who really live as children of God. They live out that identity they have been given and it is an inspiration for all of us to live out the new identity that we have been given as we have been incorporated to the body of Christ.

And finally, the Saints seek to imitate the life of Christ as much as possible. They do this by living the Beatitudes and by yearning for Jesus. In our Gospel, Jesus is depicted as tired and he wanted to rest with his disciples who had returned from teaching. The disciples and Jesus had a close relationship where they could confide in each other and share in their fraternal love and respect. Today we would say they were "**being bros.**" **I would say that the saints, regardless of whether they are male or female were and are Jesus's bros.**

And so, you see, the Saints inspire us because we recognize they have given up everything for the Lord, they've handed over their lives to God and allowed him to direct their lives, they've allowed God to shape them and mold them and forming them into beautiful masterpieces. And so, today, as a Church, we want to pray for their intercession, we also want to truly be inspired by their example so we can emulate them so, we too, can be saints in the world.

The world needs saints. Thinking of my friend, he still has not fully come back to the faith. And every time I think about that, every time I talk to him, every time I pray for him, there is a certain emptiness in my heart and there is a deep interior pain because I wish so badly I could just speak with him and give him an argument, that somehow, I could convince him that it is all true. But I realize the most of those arguments are futile. There is one thing that I can do—and that is **to be a saint for him.** That is exactly what he needs from me. I imagine that many of you are in similar situations. There are people in your lives that you want to bring into the Church and into a deep relationship with Jesus. The most important thing you can do is give every day of your life to seeking sanctity. **To truly follow the example of those men and women who have gone**

before us showing us the true beauty of what it means to live our life with authentic holiness.