

**“We shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He really is.”**

***1 Jn 3:2***

Last week we were reminded that the only purpose of our holy religion – the only reason for the existence of the Catholic Church and the Catholic Faith – is the sanctification and salvation of souls. The only job of any Catholic priest or parish is to help sanctify souls and get them into heaven.

But what does it mean to be sanctified, to be made holy?

First, as we say in the Gloria, *Tu solus sanctus*, ‘You alone are the holy one.’

Only God is holy. When we say God is holy we mean that He is perfect. He is simple (which means He is not made up of different components). He is perfectly eternal, He is perfectly One, He is perfectly good, and true, and beautiful. He is perfectly without blemish or fault of any kind. He possesses perfect knowledge of Himself and of all things. Each act of His will is perfect. And each of His attributes is infinite: He is infinitely merciful, infinitely just, infinitely blessed, and infinitely unchanging.

All of this applies to God alone, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

When we say that a human being is holy, for example St Pancras, St Pio of Pietrelcina, St Thérèse of Lisieux, and most especially the Blessed Virgin Mary, then we mean that that person shares – participates – in the perfect qualities and attributes of Almighty God. Each saint shares in different qualities to a different degree, for example St Francis of Assisi especially participated in the love of being detached from worldly things; St Dominic especially participated in the knowledge of God; and St John Vianney especially participated in the tumultuous and penitential fight against the devil.

Now, most of us probably think that we are not saints, and never could be. At one level, that is a good instinct. After all, as soon as we think we are holy, that is a sure sign that we are not. None of the saints thought of themselves as saints.

Even so, each and every one of us is called to be holy. Each and every one of us is called to be conformed to the likeness of Christ; and the more like to Christ we are, the holier we are, the more sanctified we are. And when we get to heaven, by the grace of God, we shall be as fully like to Him as it is possible for each of us to be because, as St John says in today's Second Reading, 'we shall see Him as He really is.' And that's the clue to our sanctification, to our growing in holiness: the more clearly we can see God, the more like to Him we can become.

So, what is stopping us from seeing God clearly whilst we are on earth?

First, the fact that He is in heaven and we are still here in the world below. We still have a journey to undertake, a path to follow, a Way of the Cross – a way of penitence – still to tread.

And so long as we are in these mortal bodies, with all of the desires, and temptations, and inclinations of a soul embodied in a damaged human nature, then our vision of heavenly things is clouded. Or, as St Paul puts it elsewhere, 'We see through a glass, darkly' (1 Cor 13:12, KJV). Becoming sanctified – becoming holy – means growing in such a way that we begin, bit by bit, and for the most part probably quite slowly, to see more and more clearly as the months and years pass.

But how do we do this? Well, there is a negative way and a positive way, and both are needed.

The negative way involves gradually cutting out those things that deafen us to the voice of God or blind us to His beauty. The cacophony of this world: its endless political disputes and arguments, the constant flood of information and opinion that comes pouring

into our lives through the different forms of media, the discord of modern music and entertainment, the interminable cravings for the latest gadget or novelty. We always want more, and more, and more.

Bit by bit, we must begin to cut these things out of our lives. Lent is always a good time to start this process, but we must not stop just because Lent is ended.

Then there is the positive way: the things we must do (as opposed to the things we must not do). We need to pray with humble and generous hearts, and be active in seeking the peace of God. We need to receive the grace of the Sacraments with penitence, devotion, and reverence, in the Confessional and at the altar rail. We need to read spiritual books, especially by authors whose names begin with the letter S, as St Philip Neri (1515-1595) said: St Augustine, St Catherine of Siena, St John of the Cross, and so forth. In the face of the assaults of this world, we should always be seeking to fill our minds with all things whatsoever that are holy and pure, that are just and gracious (Phil 4:8) rather than with the detritus of a sinful world.

In short, as it says at the top of our parish newsletter every week, we should always be seeking ‘to love God and the things of God,’ rather than the world and the things of the world.

This is how we begin to be sanctified, how we begin to grow in holiness, in this life, so that, when we die, we might get to see God as He really is – with unclouded sight – and so become fully like to Him.