"Who are these clothed, in white robes?"

Apoc 7:13

Before the changes in the Church in the 1960s, the feast of Christ the King was on the last Sunday of October, that is, the last Sunday before the feast of All Saints on 1st November and the Commemoration of the Holy Souls on 2nd. On that day is celebrated the sovereignty of Christ over all things, in heaven and on earth, and in particular His victory over death. It was kept on that day because it proclaimed Christ's kingship over all, and opened the gates of His kingdom, as it were, to the saints whose robes had been washed white in the Blood of the Lamb, and to the Holy Souls in Purgatory. The three feast days – Christ the King, All Saints, and All Souls Day – were designed to be of a piece; a single celebration of Christ's triumph.

And that is what we celebrate today on the feast of All Saints, namely Christ's triumph in the lives of those who now reign with Him in heaven; and not just those whom the Church has canonized and formally recognized as saints, but all of those in heaven, perhaps even some of our loved ones among them. And the Church keeps this feast for two reasons.

First, to sing the praises of God who has triumphed in the lives of those who are already in heaven. No one gets to heaven through his own efforts, but through the grace, and the mercy, and the power of God who raises up His saints from sin to holiness, so that even the most downcast sinner may rise with Christ and reign with Him through the forgiveness of his sins and the resurrection to new life.

Second, in today's feast the Church holds up to us the promise of hope, we who are still on earth and who so often feel that we are battling with the weariness and

the drudgery of life in this vale of tears. On this day, the windows of heaven are opened, and the resplendent glory of the heavenly multitude shines down upon us and beckons us onward and upwards in our pilgrim journey of faith.

But what does it take to complete this journey? What does it take to become a saint? What does it take for us to join the throng of saints in heaven?

Today's feast – like tomorrow's Commemoration of the Holy Souls – is a feast of the Church Herself. To become a saint, we must become a child of God, as St John tells us in today's Second Reading. We must not only be baptized into God's holy family, we must also grow as a member of that family, becoming, day by day, more fully absorbed into the life of Christ, being conformed to a greater likeness to Christ as time goes by. Through prayer and penance, and by practising the virtues day by day – both in how we behave towards God and how we behave towards our neighbour, as outlined in the Beatitudes in today's Gospel – we must become re-shaped until we are perfect images of Christ. If this process has been completed by the time we die, then we are already saints and will go straight to heaven. If this process has not been completed when we die – which will probably be the case for most of us – then this process will be completed in Purgatory. But in either case, no one can enter heaven until he or she is made to be like to Christ, again as St John tells us in today's Second Reading when he says that 'when [God] appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.'

And this is what the Catholic Church is for: to provide us with everything we need to become more like to Christ: the grace of the Sacraments, the forgiveness of sins, the teaching of God's wisdom, the rules by which we should live, and the path which we must follow.

But more than that, the Church Herself is the mystical presence of Christ. By following the Church's lead, we are following in the footsteps of Christ Himself. The Church is not a mere human institution whose counsels and precepts we can choose to follow or not as we wish, like Adam and Eve. Not, at any rate, if we wish to get to heaven. The Church is as much the Body of Christ as the Holy Eucharist is the Body of Christ, and we can only get to heaven by living in and through the Church, by breathing with the Church, and allowing Her to breathe in us. Like the saints, we must become absorbed into the Church and allow Her to live in us, and to rule and govern us, because She is the mystical presence of Christ Himself. Indeed, the Church is our only means of growing in holiness and of getting to heaven because *Christ* is our only means of growing in holiness and of getting to heaven, for as Christ Himself says, 'No one can come to the Father except through me' (Jn 14:6). In other words, no one who is in heaven got there without Christ and His Church.

And this is why today's feast of All Saints, and tomorrow's Commemoration of the Holy Souls, are celebrations of the Church Herself, of the triumph of God's kingdom, and of the reign of Christ's kingship.