

Solemnity of All Saints
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – November 1, 2017
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Most of us love family reunions. They usually take place in a vacation spot, or in the homes of loved ones. There is always plenty of food and plenty of animated conversation. It is a chance to catch up with extended family you haven't seen in a while – to hear about the joys and sorrows of their lives. Invariably someone has a new job and someone else is sick of their old one. Someone's child is graduating this year and someone else's is just hoping not to flunk out. It is a chance to be together, to share old stories and celebrate those who have gone before. Yes, family reunions are fun – and the best part is you don't have to see most of that group until the next reunion!

In some ways, we think of this feast – of All Saints Day – as a Catholic family reunion. We gather together with the whole family, in the company of the saints – not just in their memory, mind you, because in Christ they live on in eternal life. We indeed gather in their company, with them and with God. It is a time to reflect upon how God acted in the lives of the saints – and how he tries to act in our lives when we let him. It is a time to draw strength from those saints who suffered for their faith, and to rejoice with all – the famous and those completely unknown – who now find themselves in heaven. It is a great annual tradition – a once-a-year family reunion.

The trouble with that analogy, however, is that it ignores basic Catholic sacramental theology. We don't come together with the communion of saints for some once-a-year family reunion. Each and every time we gather to celebrate the Eucharistic liturgy, each time we surround the altar of the Lord, earth and heaven unite. It is as though the skies open and the hosts of heaven – angels and saints – are in our midst – or more appropriately, we are drawn into their midst, into the company of heaven. That's why every Mass is spectacular – whether the homily is inspiring or boring, whether the music is traditional or contemporary or non-existent, whether the ministers are well-trained or stumbling through. Each and every Mass is spectacular because of the company we keep – because we are intimately united with the hosts of heaven around the throne of the Lamb. Some Christians see the Book of Revelation – from which our first reading today was taken – as some sort of mysterious chart of cosmic events – as God's blueprint for the end times. Catholics understand it differently. The Book of Revelation is a primer on the liturgy. It is the apocalyptic description of the sacramental theology of the early church. The community of believers understood that Jesus Christ had

not left them orphans – he had invited them into his company – into the community of the Trinity, and into the heavenly host. They became church when the events of our salvation – the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ were liturgically represented. And it was in the sacramental presence of our God that the whole of the Christian community unites – those on earth and those in heaven. That’s our great family reunion, that’s the company we celebrate today. Each time we gather for Mass, then, we celebrate All Saints Day – we celebrate Trinity Sunday – we celebrate Easter. We remember that we are not only in God’s presence, but the presence of his angels and saints as well. Quite a family, quite a meal, quite a celebration.