

By 16 October 2003, the 25th. Anniversary of John Paul II becoming Bishop of

Rome and Pastor of the Universal Church, he'd created 1792 Saints, and

Beatii. [1319 Beatified; 473 canonised]

This is more than the combined 299 Saints created by all the previous Popes since 1588; although it's not as many as the 144,000 sealed by the Lord in the Revelation of John - the second reading for today's Feast.

Although created is not really the best word I could have used for the Pope Canonising a Saint.

Declared or Proclaimed would be better because the Pope doesn't actually make Saints.

Only God the Father, through the indwelling power of the Spirit in each Christian, moulds men and women into the image and likeness of Jesus, His One and Only Son.

They, in their turn, lovingly respond to His call so that they will decrease, and Christ will increase in them; this is what creates a Saint.

The Church, after looking closely at the lives of individual Christians, says that this person during their earthly life became perfectly conformed to Christ, and are living in the Presence of God.

Then the Pope, in the name of the Church Canonises, or enrolls them into the list of Saints.

473, 299 or 144,000 Saints in the great scheme of things are an infinitely small number; particularly when we reflect on a: “Vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb.” Rev. 7: 9 which John saw in his vision of heaven.

Those millions of unknown ordinary people, like us, who’ve followed Jesus faithfully over 2000 years.

The bottom line is, though, that statistics don’t prove anything in Christian terms because the Lord doesn’t work like that.

So to look at the success or failure of Christianity just by using numbers is a futile exercise.

After all, Jesus only had 12 Apostles: one betrayed Him, and all but one of the remaining 11 ran away, and left Him to die on the Cross.

But just one person is all Jesus wants.

One person who firmly believes and truly in Him as their Lord and Saviour.

That one person is me and you; each one of us here today.

He asks each of us individually to decide for ourselves if He is not only the Lord, but also my Lord.

We can’t evade that question by thinking that there’s safety in numbers, and assume that by saying, “I’m a Catholic,” is enough.

We can't use the Church to hide behind to avoid Jesus engaging us with a look of love, and asking us: "But who do you say I am?" Mt. 16: 15

The Church, as we say in the Creed, is holy.

But we'd be deluding ourselves if we didn't admit that it has human failure, and sin within it.

It's a Church of Saints and sinners.

But its heart is holy because Jesus Christ is its heart, and indwells it through His Spirit; and the very reason the Church exists is to call sinners to become Saints.

To do that the Church must always be listening to its Lord; teaching, and leading it into the deep, still waters of trusting Him, and not trusting in any human power alone.

Then it will be a true school for Saints, and be so compellingly attractive that the vision John had on the Island of Patmos of: "A vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb." Rev. 7: 9 Will come to pass.

So the Feast of All Saints is an annual reminder to the Church that this is the business it's in.

But more than that; it's our special Feast Day because as Paul says: "We are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Saviour." Phil. 3: 20

So, whether we think we're good enough or not, our final destination is heaven in the Communion of Saints.

An existence so wonderful that John could only use fantastic images to describe what he really saw.

But let's not get caught in the trap of thinking of the Book of Revelation as an irrelevance because of the visions recorded there.

Or look at all the symbolic numbers used in the Book, and from them, try to make a timetable for the return of Jesus at the end of time.

Many people over the centuries have fallen into those particular traps, and come unstuck.

Because of that, the Book of Revelation is a piece of Scripture that's quietly ignored, because it's thought to be too difficult or too wacky to make any sense of!

But the reality of the Book is that it proclaims the message of salvation just as much as the rest of the New Testament.

The central core of the vision is, that despite the suffering and sin to be found in the world, the persecutions that Christians were - and still are enduring for the name of Jesus Christ - despite what appears to be all the evidence to the contrary; Jesus is Lord.

World events are unfolding on this side of the veil as if there is no God; but John tells us he's seen beyond the veil, and the Lord is in control in this world, and the next.

And, we can be certain of that, because at the centre of all things is Jesus whom John sees as: "A lamb, looking as if it had been slain, and standing in the centre of the throne." Rev. 5: 6

Jesus, the Divine King of the Universe, suffered and died like a sacrificial lamb for us so that we can stand before Him, our sins washed: "White in the blood of the Lamb." Rev. 7: 14

What we can learn from All Saint's Day is that the Church in heaven is the perfected Church on earth: "A radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." Eph. 5: 27

Now Jesus dwells in each Christian by His Holy Spirit; and the Church is His temple on earth, which should constantly be striving to reflect that glorious vision of Paul's in his Letter to the Ephesians.

And let's always remember: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, [through Christ Jesus] that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" 1 Jn. 3: 1

So that we can take our place in that radiant Church; with the Saints, worshipping: "In front of the throne and before the Lamb." Rev. 7: 9

This means that, if we're serious about wanting to be with the Lord when we go through the valley of the shadow of death, then only Jesus is joy to the heart in this life.

Because the only way to live life to the full now, so that we can inherit eternal life, is to have a: "Personal and profound experience of Jesus Christ and His love. And....this is true for every Christian: Faith is first and foremost an individual and intimate encounter with Jesus, it means experiencing His closeness, His friendship, His love; only in this way does one learn to know him ever more, and to love and follow him ever more.

May this happen to each one of us."

Pope Benedict XVI: General Audience St. Peter's Square 21.10.2009