

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Today the Church celebrates the Feast of All Saints. It's hard to imagine that we are already into the month of November, given what a year this has been. It seems in some ways a lifetime away from March 15th, when the impact of the Covid-19 began to be felt in a very real way by all segments of our parish family. I think we can all agree that one of the ways that has helped us to adapt and even thrive in this very strange time is our prayers to the saints. It is always edifying to hear parishioners speak of their favorite saints and how the saints intercede for them and change their lives. Often we pray to the saints in moments of need and distress; it is also important to pray to them in thanksgiving and gratitude for all the blessings and graces which God brings our way.

The abbot St. Bernard, in a sermon on a consideration of the saints, offers this instructive reflection: "Calling the saints to mind inspires, or rather arouses in us, above all else, a longing to enjoy their company, is desirable in itself. We long to share in the citizenship of heaven, to dwell with the spirits of the blessed, to join the assembly of patriarchs, the ranks of the prophets, the council of apostles, the great host of martyrs, the noble company of confessors and the choir of virgins. In short, we long to be united in happiness with all the saints.

Come brothers, let us at length spur ourselves on. We must rise again with Christ, we must seek the world which is above and set our mind on the things of heaven. Let us long for those who are longing for us, hasten to those who are waiting for us, and ask those who look for our coming to intercede for us. We should not only want to be with the saints, we should also hope to possess their happiness. When we commemorate the saints we are inflamed with another yearning: that Christ our life may also appear to us as he appeared to them and that we may one day share in his glory."

Tomorrow we celebrate All Souls Day, the day when we commemorate all of our loved ones who have passed away. I am grateful to all our parishioners and friends who sent in names to be remembered at the Holy Altar throughout the month of November. In addition to this being a very difficult year due to Covid-19, I realize many of us have lost family members and friends who have had a significant impact on our lives.

I think each day of two very close friends who died this year. Marie Annuzzi was the longtime secretary at St. Kevin's Church in Bernal Heights in San Francisco. I met Marie when I was eight years old and we became very close over the years. I last spoke with her on Tuesday of Holy Week. It was a very warm day and as we reminisced about the "golden years" of St. Kevin's, I remarked that on that Tuesday I felt what it must have been like to be a priest in the early 70's. I was privileged to be with her sons and their families as I anointed Marie the day she died and then to preach her funeral Mass at St. Paul's Church. Marie was a wonderful friend who was so supportive of the priests of the Archdiocese. Marie was an indispensable support to me and many others and I miss her each day. There are still days when I want to pick up the phone and call her!

On June 24th, my longtime mentor and friend, Fr. Ken Westray, passed away unexpectedly. I had just spoken to him the previous Saturday. I met Fr. Ken when I was a student at the University of San Francisco and we began a lifelong friendship. At the time, Fr. Ken was pastor of Sacred Heart Church in the Western Addition neighborhood of San Francisco. He was young, dynamic and full of life and zeal. He was incredibly joyful, positive and generous. His was a very poor parish with a struggling school. Yet, it was an exciting and happy community, despite its many struggles and challenges. I volunteered as a teacher and coach and learned so many life lessons by working alongside others so different from myself. When I worked in the Mayor's Office, I along with so many others supported the Sacred Heart School financially and with in-kind services and donations. Once people met Fr. Ken and the students, they wanted to chip in and help. Fr. Ken was fearless and unabashed in his love for his parishioners. He would not hesitate to make a sick call or visit someone in distress in some of the most dangerous housing projects in the City.

Fr. Ken supported me when I entered the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) and when I returned to the seminary. I was privileged to do a “Pre-Pastoral Year” with him at St. Sebastian’s Church in Kentfield. It was one of the happiest years of my life. I learned so much from him about pastoral sensitivity and kindness in addition to boundless generosity. I was also blessed to serve with him when he became pastor of St. Vincent de Paul Church in San Francisco. Again, it was a joyful experience rich in enthusiasm and apostolic zeal. We spoke to each other often and I truly regarded him as a “big brother” just as he would call me “little brother” when giving me some very pertinent advice or life lessons. Along with Jesuit Father George Schultze, Fr. Ken vested me on the day of my priesthood ordination and I offered my First Mass at St. Vincent de Paul. He was a man of great compassion, common sense, and conviction. Fr. Piers Lahey, a priest of the Archdiocese, aptly described Fr. Ken’s death as the silencing of a voice so desperately needed these days. As an African American priest, Fr. Ken understood well the pain of racism and discrimination, and yet he used those challenges to be a bridge-builder and bring people together. Fr. Pier’s words for Fr. Ken were a fitting tribute to a magnanimous and big-hearted brother in the Lord.

On this All Souls Day and throughout the month of November, let us pray in thanksgiving to Almighty God for the gift of family and friends who have loved and nurtured us along this pilgrim’s way. Let us ask our faithfully departed to intercede for us in the heavenly abode!

I know I speak for the entire parish as I heartily welcome back on campus our school children. It is hard to imagine our students have not been physically present here since mid-March. I am most grateful to Mr. Nava, Ms. Costa, the entire faculty and staff of our parish. I am appreciative to our parents and students who have made the best of most unusual circumstances. As our families return onsite, I hope this offers us an opportunity for renewal and recommitment to one another and our Catholic values and identity. I pray that these many months have taught us an appreciation for the dedication and hard work by everyone in our community. We have truly exhibited the Shamrock Spirit and I am looking forward to this new chapter in the life of our parish!

Fr. Tom