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Bishop of Rapid City**

**Homily for the Feast of All Saints
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Cathedral**

November 1, 2012

In June 1896, rebels overran the village and captured Fr. Jacques Berthieu, a French priest. Near Ambiatibe, Madagascar, their leader ordered six armed men to go to him. When Fr. Berthieu saw them, he knelt down before them and made the sign of the cross. One of the leaders said, “Give up your stupid religion. Do not deceive the people. We will take you into our group, and make you our chief and advisor.” He answered, “My son, I cannot possibly agree with this. I would rather die.” Subsequently he was shot to death.

In 1877, Mother Marianne Cope, Superior General of the Franciscan Sisters of Syracuse, NY, went to present day Hawaii to help six volunteer sisters settle down in the area where they would be ministering to the lepers. Deeply touched by the plight of those with Hansen’s Disease (or leprosy), she chose to remain with them. She ministered to the residents of “Leper Hospital” in Honolulu for five years. And then she spent the next 30 years ministering to lepers at the isolated Kalaupapa Peninsula.

On April 2, 1672, Pedro Calungsod, a 17-year-old Filipino catechist, came to the village of Tomhom on the Island Guam with a priest to baptize a baby. The baby’s father refused to have him baptized and shortly thereafter killed both of them.

In around the year 1677, after her conversion to Christianity, St. Kateri Tekakwitha was the target of harassment and persecution at home because of her faith and her determination to live her life as a virgin. Her young life ended at the age 23 but was sustained by her Christian faith and by an ardent love of Jesus present in the Eucharist, finding in Christ the strength to withstand the hostile pressure of the non-Christian culture in which she lived. As we recall her last words, “Jesus, I love you.”

I just returned from Rome last week from her canonization, the canonization of the four saints I just mentioned and three others. These women and men led their lives of faith in extraordinary ways, being a living expression of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The saints whose names you have chosen for Confirmation were the same way.

Each year when this Feast of All Saints comes around, I believe that it is a reminder of the universal call to holiness. The many saints who have given their lives for the gospel of Jesus Christ are a constant reminder of who we are to be.

Pope Benedict says, *“To become saints means to fulfill completely what we already are, raised to the dignity of God’s adopted children in Christ Jesus. Nothing can bring us into close contact with the beauty of Christ himself other than the world created by faith and the light that shines out from the faces of the saints, through whom his own light becomes visible.”* How beautiful is that!

Again, I think this feast day reminds us all of our call to holiness. I believe that all the saints have at least three things in common in answering their own call to holiness.

1. They had a deep and profound love for Jesus Christ that was fostered and enriched through a life of prayer, each and every day. In their own personal way, as they answered their own call to discipleship, their relationship with Jesus Christ guided them as they completely surrendered their life to the Lord. Their love was so deep that nothing would stand in their way of bringing the gospel to others even if it meant death itself.
2. The Holy Eucharist was foundational to their life of holiness and service of the Gospel. They understood that each time they received Jesus in the Eucharist it was a personal encounter with him “who loved them to the end.” The sacramental life of the Church is what strengthened them to put their lives at the service of the Gospel. They responded to the words, “Do this in memory of me.”
3. Lastly, their relationship with the Lord compelled them to respond to those in need regardless of the challenges. Through Christ, they were able to except the mystery of the cross in love and gratitude. The love of the cross enabled them to welcome all those who are suffering and in need. Nothing would keep them from giving their lives away to others, never counting the cost.

But in reality, these women and men were no different than us. They were ordinary people just like us, but chose to follow Christ wherever He led them. They had no advantages to saintliness different than we. The world in which they lived was just as chaotic and messed up as our present day world. Yet they constantly persevered in living lives of virtue and humility. They realized that the Christian message was in direct contrast with that of the world. But they willingly accepted the challenge to try to make the world holy through their lifestyles and their commitment to their faith.

In reality, they lived lives true to who they were, [and we are] as God’s adopted children in Christ Jesus. The light of Jesus Christ became visible in the faces of these men and women.

The Beatitudes which we heard today and that Jesus offers us are a sign of contradiction to the world’s understanding of happiness and joy. The lives of all saints, too, are a sign of contradiction to the world’s understanding of happiness and joy.

We often define the word “blessed” as someone holy, and sacred. **But the blessed are not souls without bodies. They are people who live ordinary lives extraordinarily well.** They show us how to live with sincerity and with truth. They are people who forgive and symbolize peace in their encounters. They may have been hurt but they are rich in mercy. They are people who try to do things without expecting any reward, for they know that God outdoes us in generosity. They dare us and show us that it is possible to live meaningfully. They are in front of us. Are we among them? Are we walking with them?

The beatitudes which Jesus offers us are a sign of contradiction to the world’s understanding of happiness and joy. The lives of all saints, too, are a sign of contradiction to the world’s understanding and joy.

Today as we celebrate the saints who have shown us how discipleship is truly lived, we are reminded that to be a saint is not necessarily to be in heaven now but **in Jesus now** — in His death and resurrection... offering our lives as a sacrifice for others.

I think that the saints of yesterday and today not only challenge us to take notice of our own lives, but they give us clear example of what holiness looks like... and offer us encouragement that all of us can get there.

I would like to conclude with prayer to one of our newest saints, St. Kateri –

*God of all nations and peoples,
you have filled your creation with your mighty presence.
Through your handiwork you speak to our hearts
words that satisfy our every desire.*

*You called your servant, the Mohawk maiden St. Kateri Tekakwitha,
to embrace the Gospel of your Son Jesus Christ,
to do your will and to serve others with the gifts you gave her.*

*May she who held tight to the cross of your Son
throughout her short life marked by sickness, suffering and persecution,
be our intercessor during our own trials.
May her embrace of the Catholic faith
and her openness to sharing Jesus with others
inspire us to be new evangelizers to all cultures and peoples.*

*May she who sought out Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament
lead us to similar reverence for the Eucharist
so that, like St. Kateri, our last words may also be,
“Jesus, I love you.”
Amen.*