

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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Happy All Saint's Day, everyone!

It is a real *joy* to celebrate this feast with you, the first major one since my arrival at the Tower.

I really hope that later today, if you are able, you will all have a nice meal and a drink to celebrate... Or celebrate in whatever way you prefer.

I am planning to go to a local pub for lunch, and I'll probably treat myself to pint as well. If anyone would like to join me, you're more than welcome! And that is a genuine offer.

And I say this, because I think that as a Church over the years, we've sometimes lost sight of the significance of such Christian festivals, of feast days, of these celebrations.

And so my prayer is that, as we move forward, we take these days more seriously. That we allow them to punctuate our everyday lives a little more.

Because they are a great demonstration of our hope and faith and joy as a Christian community.

And after all, the Scriptures are quite clear that Jesus loved a party, so why shouldn't we?!

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But anyway, back to All Saints' Day. What is it all about?

Well, All Saints' Day is often thought about in two ways.

One is that it is a feast that gathers up and celebrates all those saints who are forgotten or neglected, all those unknown to us.

Because the Church has always believed that the saints we *don't* know about, those whose lives of goodness and holiness were only seen by God, are *at least* as important as the ones that fill our liturgical calendar.

And indeed, we *do* celebrate those saints today. And not only do we celebrate them, but we celebrate *with* them.

Because All Saints' Day, and indeed All Souls' Day, have always stemmed from the belief that there is a powerful spiritual bond between those who have gone before us and are now with God, the "Church triumphant", and those of us on earth, right here, right now.

And if the resurrection of Jesus Christ shows us anything, it is that this is true. That death is not a boundary to relationship, to the giving and receiving of love.

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It's the *other* way All Saints' Day is thought about though, that I want to talk about this morning.

It is the belief that All Saints' Day is the great feast where we begin to acknowledge and pursue, our *own* calling to sainthood, our own pursuit of holiness.

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Now, I'll be honest, I always used to think that the mere suggestion that I had a hope in hell's chance of becoming a saint was quite frankly, ridiculous.

To my mind, saints were always those people who were and are, incredibly good and nice.

Saints, holy people, were those who would always say and do the right things. Those who would be much more generous, and much more forgiving than I could ever imagine.

And to be honest, I've always thought of myself as, at best, a sort of mediocre Christian.

I have a go, but like all of us, I find it hard.

Too often, I'll say something I probably shouldn't have done. *Not* do something I maybe should've done.

And so for me, the idea of being a saint, even like a saint, achieving holiness...well it was out of the question.

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But the more I have thought about this, the more I think that this perspective of holiness, of sainthood, is an impoverished one.

Now, don't get me wrong. Those Christian virtues or generosity, forgiveness, love and compassion, they are absolutely a part of what holiness should look like.

But as I read the scriptures, if you explore the stories of the lives of the great saints, the *full* stories... well I think you'll find I, *we*, have still got a bit of hope, that the pursuit of holiness is not yet lost for us all.

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Look, for example, at two of the most celebrate saints and apostles, Peter and Paul.

St Peter was an absolute disaster at times. Telling Jesus off, denying him, on the whole totally misunderstanding him.

St Paul, in his early days, not only totally rejected Christianity but actively persecuted it. Hardly a glowing CV for elevation to sainthood.

So what is it then that made these people saints? Because it wasn't that they were perfect models of politeness and charity their whole lives.

What it is, I think, that made these people saints, that made them *holy*, is that **they** became who they were meant to be...

...They became who they were meant to be!

That, I think, is what holiness is, that is what it is to be a saint.

And the more I've thought about this, the more I've realised that that's what I want too! It's the thing that I think *all of us* most deeply long for.

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But of course, this is actually quite counter cultural really, being yourself, becoming who you are meant to be.

Because we live in a world where we're *constantly* being told that we should be someone else!

That we should be prettier, more handsome, more chiselled, have more hair, have better hair....

We live in a world where we're constantly being told that we should live the life of someone else.

That we should have plusher houses, sexier cars, more money, a perfect family...

But despite what the adverts and the influencers tell us, we know in our heart, I think, that this is a lie.

Not least because, maybe even after years of pushing back, we realise that the hairline does recede, that age takes its toll, and that the family...well, they're real, and you spend Christmas with them...

In the end, we realise that we can only ever be ourselves.

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But don't let this get you down, because in reality, this is a relief.

Because despite what you're led to believe, being *you*, being *us*, is exactly what we should be.

And when we start on this journey, when we ask God to make us more fully who we really are, suddenly the fear, the sense of inadequacy, the sense of failure falls away.

Steadily, we become much happier, more relaxed, more fulfilled. Ultimately, much more ourselves.

Such is the transformational power of God.

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So for any of you, like me, who have at times fallen for the seductive philosophies of the world, that if you were *just* a bit more like her or him, or could *just* have what they had, that you'd be happy: well, it's fake news!

And here's the real truth, the great truth not just of All Saints' Day, but of the whole Christian life:

Through relationship with God in Jesus Christ, and therefore in relationship with one another in his Church, we can become ourselves, we can become who we are meant to be.

Or in other words: I worship, therefore I am. I become myself, in relationship with God.

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So, if we are to pursue our call to holiness, if we are to become the saints we are called to be, if we are to truly celebrate this great feast, we must first say our prayers, every day.

It's the most important thing, to check in with God, to allow him to get us that bit easier.

But then we must allow him to form us into who we really are.

Through communion with God in the Eucharist, through communion with others in the Church, through love and service of the world... We must follow God in Jesus Christ, with all we can offer.

Because when we do so, we know true holiness, we know true love, we know true life. Life in all its beautiful fullness.

Amen.