

**Homily for Knights of Columbus Hall of Fame Mass and Banquet  
Solemnity of All Saints  
October 31, 2015**

**Sacred Heart Church  
Effingham, IL**

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki  
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, in the world of sports, just this past week, baseball fans were treated to the beginning of another installment of the Fall Classic, also known as the World Series. As in other major sports, the quest for a championship is the ultimate sign of success for a team in any given season. Even if the winner did not have the best regular season record, they are still recognized as the best team because of their triumph when the stakes were the highest.

As far as individual success goes, the ultimate honor for a baseball player or other athlete is to be inducted into the Hall of Fame, a distinction which recognizes a career marked by excellence and achievement. Being inducted into the Hall of Fame is an opportunity for the individual to celebrate, as well as providing an opportunity for family, friends, and fans to join in that celebration as a sign of their gratitude for the contribution that player has had on the game.

Today, the Church turns her attention to her own version of the Hall of Fame as we celebrate the Solemnity of All Saints. We recognize all of those members of the Body of Christ who have entered into that place of great honor in the glory of Heaven. The concept of the Hall of Fame, whether it be baseball, or another sport or activity, offers several parallels that can help us to see the significance of the feast day in the life of the Church. At the same time, there are many differences which highlight the unique nature of this concept of our faith known as the communion of saints.

Just as with the Hall of Fame in sports, the saints who are in Heaven are those who have excelled in their career as disciples of Jesus Christ. The saints are those who have used the gifts given to them for the benefit of the Church and the world, just as the skill of athletes benefit the teams of which they are a member.

Just as with the Hall of Fame, there is a process involved in recognizing certain individuals for their heroic virtue and witness to the faith. The Church's recognition, similar in a way to a Hall of Fame induction, takes place at the canonization, during which the Church confirms that the saint is indeed in Heaven. These celebrations are a cause

for great rejoicing for the entire Church, and they often draw thousands of the faithful who join in that celebration.

Even though there is a formal process for recognizing that a saint is indeed in Heaven, the process is not like the Hall of Fame where the person is voted in by a committee. It is Christ, the Eternal Judge, and He alone who elects to welcome one of His servants to be in Heaven with Him. As a result of that, there are saints in Heaven of whom we are unaware. In the vision of Heaven recorded by St. John in our First Reading, he speaks of a “great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue” (Revelation 7:9). Those saints whom the Church has recognized formally are but a portion of those who have been elected by Christ to share in the victory of eternal life in Heaven.

This is at the heart of our celebration of All Saints Day. We give honor to all of the saints whom, in His great generosity, God has admitted to stand “before the throne and before the Lamb” (*ibid*) in glory. It gives us great hope that it is God and not man who will be our judge, for His great love and mercy far exceed that which our humanity, wounded by Original Sin, could ever express. To those who submit themselves to His mercy and

do not reject His offer for eternal life, the Lord, is indeed “gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in mercy” (Psalm 145:8).

This point causes us to reflect on another difference that exists in the analogy of the Hall of Fame and Heaven. When it comes down to it, the Hall of Fame is limited in whom it would consider for acceptance. Children, for example, are not really candidates for many versions of the Hall of Fame, usually because they have not developed the skills or had the experience to make a significant impact. In Heaven, there no doubt is a multitude of children who, though only on earth for a short time, have been found worthy to be among the great saints who did remarkable things.

Those in the Hall of Fame are usually recognized for their success in their field or sport. While this is true with many saints whom we recognize by name, there are many saints whom the world might consider a failure. There are those who toiled day in and day out without any tangible signs of success. Many of these saints were despised or rejected by those around them, but in God’s eyes, they were faithful to Him and His will, despite a supposed lack of results.

Jesus makes this point clearly in the Sermon on the Mount, the beginning of which we heard for our Gospel today. He declares blessed those who go through life in a way that seems opposed to earthly success and happiness. What seems to be undesirable and unattractive to the world is precious in the eyes of the Lord. As a result, so many saints pass by our sight as being insignificant, while, in truth, they have lived lives of the greatest sanctity in the world and have found rest and peace in the Kingdom of Heaven.

This should give us hope and encouragement that we do not necessarily have to do great things to be recognized by others. Our sole aim should be to remain faithful to what the Lord has given to us, desiring to please Him alone. It also reminds us that even if we suffer, are persecuted, ignored or forgotten by the world around us, we will never escape the loving gaze of our Father in Heaven who has a great love for the humble and those who the world considers to be of little importance. So many have achieved Heaven in this simple, hidden way, and their joy, like those whose name we know, is complete (cf. John 15:11), for they do not need the praise of man, but are totally content with gazing upon the Lord for all of eternity. Such should be our ultimate desire as well, as we repeat

the words of the psalmist: “Not to us, LORD, not to us but to your name give the glory” (Psalm 115:1).

One final point of comparison with the Hall of Fame is that the entrance into that place of recognition comes at the end of a journey, one that has often involved much hard work and several stumbles along the way. Athletes are usually only considered for the Hall of Fame after retirement, when the person is no longer physically capable of continuing to play the game. This is also the case with the saints. They do not enter into Heaven until they have “retired” from this life, when their earthly bodies can no longer continue and death has arrived.

There is a significant difference, however, that is of great importance for our understanding of the communion of saints. Unlike athletes who are no longer able to do great things in their sport after their retirement, those who have left this earthly life for Heaven do not suffer the same fate. In fact, once they are in Heaven, they are able to be far more effective after that so-called retirement from this life than ever. In Heaven, the saints are not limited by their bodies, or even by space or time, thus giving them the freedom to do remarkable things for us who remain here on earth.

As one of the prefaces for the funeral Masses for the Dead reminds us: "Indeed for your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended."<sup>1</sup> Our relationship with those who have passed away endures past death, and our bond with those who are in Heaven is stronger than ever. Their great love for us and their desire to have us join them in Heaven prompts them to intercede before God day and night for our needs. It is humbling to think how good the Lord is in granting us so many intercessors to aid us in our journey. It is good for us to call upon them regularly, those we know by name, and those we don't, trusting that they hear us and ask God for what we are most in need of in order to advance closer to our destiny in Heaven.

As we continue this Mass, we come to the altar which unites us to the Church throughout the world. We are also united through the Eucharistic sacrifice with those who have gone before us and are already in Heaven. Finally, we are united with those in Purgatory who await their entrance into Heaven after their purification. While we pray for them in a special way tomorrow on All Souls Day, we remember those Poor Souls at each Mass and our prayers for them are our greatest gift to them. Let us desire to receive the Eucharist with greater love and fervor so that we may be strengthened by that gift, along with the prayers of the saints in Heaven, so

that at the end of our life, we may be welcomed by the Lord into their company in Heaven to rejoice for the rest of eternity.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> Roman Missal, Preface I for the Dead.