

November 1, 2012 – Feast of All Saints

Prepared by Sr. Ann Hayden, MM

Revelations 7:2-4,9-14; Psalm 24:1-6; First John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12

“Who shall ascend your hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully. They will receive blessings from the Lord... Such is the company of those who seek...the face of God...” Psalm 24:3-6

The Feast of All Saints is not a call to celebrate an elite group who lived extraordinary lives setting them apart from the many, ordinary sinner-folk like us. Today's feast is about celebrating the open invitation by the God-of-Communion to all of creation and all peoples of every nation, and language as participants in God's Trinitarian process that promises fullness of life for all.

Today is a day of celebration, a “fiesta” of transformation embraced as expressed in the Beatitudes of today's Gospel. The transforming qualities required of members of the Reign of God are the same as those brought to life, death and new life in Jesus' own expression of the paschal mystery. Matthew stresses active love and compassion as necessary qualities of the disciple of Jesus and John in the second reading stresses that disciples are beloved children of God. As such, we can expect no other fate than that of Jesus. God calls us to a spirit of self-emptying which we live into as God's partners in mission, striving in humility and compassion, to comfort those who mourn; to act with hunger and thirst for justice; to open our hearts to see God in all around us; to be peacemakers and to persevere in the face of suffering that is a participation in the paschal mystery of God.

Recently, in the mountainous area of Jacaltenango, Guatemala, I found myself participating in what I consider a communion of saints. It was a celebration of the beatitudes lived as a uniting spirit of God's favor among peoples of different culture and language and tradition who came together to dream, sustain and nourish their common good into reality. In doing so they built a bond of community expressed in self-emptying and self-gift that witnesses even today to Jesus' life, death and on-going life among us.

We gathered for the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Jacaltenango Hospital, which was the dream child of the Mayan people and the Maryknoll missionaries who worked together there in the 1960s. They imagined a hospital that would provide modern medical care and community-based health services throughout an area accessible only by mule or horseback. Realizing the dream took the sacrifice of all in backbreaking work, spirit challenging set-backs, the mutual wiping away of tears in hours of shared hunger, thirst and emptying of self for what was right and just. Together they built a hospital and, even more profoundly, their passion purified their hearts and built a communion that is firmly bonded in love 50 years later.

As the official celebration was unfolding, I witnessed, amidst the flowers and the speeches, in the singing and the dancing, a celebration of communion and relationship. It was present in the gentle greetings and huge embraces of old friends. It was present in the tears over those who are diminished or have joined the ancestors. It was present in the faces lit with joy and in the ears turned to hear again the stories of sacrifice and of selfless courage. It is present today in the hope that has been engendered in the sons and daughters of the Mayan people and in the newer generations of Maryknoll, who have all heard the stories and are encouraged by the witness of these partners in God's mission, who strove and continue to strive in humility and compassion for the lived present and awaited future of the Reign of God.

In Christ, we are no longer sinner or saint, Jew or gentile, slave or free, man or woman. We are all called to be the Communion of Saints NOW and to live into the gift that God's favor offers. While we may not, in this life, see the fruit of our labor, if we labor in sincere love; in active endurance; in non-violent grief and in merciful peacemaking, then the Beatitudes, as a declaration of God's promise to the lowly, bring us joy and happiness now and always. Happy are we when, together, we build the Communion of LOVE.