

Walk tall with the Saints

I love the saints! For me it is one of the best things about being Catholic, this sense of being surrounded, supported and lifted up by a host of 'big brothers and sisters' in faith. Like a family opening treasured photo albums and telling the stories of its ancestors, on All Saints day, All Souls day and throughout the month of November Catholics remember their ancestors in faith. In this vein I offer five brief points for reflection:

1. Saints mean celebration

What is extraordinary about the saints in heaven is not just their exemplary earthly lives but the fact that they are in communion with one another in the presence of God right now. What a cause for celebration! (In fact, an 'All Saints' party in November would be very appropriate.) Furthermore, we too are part of that communion. Through baptism we are bonded beyond the constraints of time and space. Even now, as the body of Christ, we walk tall with the saints in the presence of God.

2. Saints raise our sights

Our ancestors in faith were people of courage and conviction. They lived life to the full and 'gave their all' to God. When we find ourselves settling for less, becoming cynical or discouraged, the saints help to raise our sights, fill us with new hope and shake us out of our earthbound

ways of seeing things. Here is a simple pastoral tip: Spice up a dull parish meeting by telling the story of an ordinary person who did extraordinary things for God. Leave the backlog of problems for a moment and be inspired!

3. Saints calls us forth

Saints have been canonised, not because they were perfect people but because they exhibited qualities which the Church most needed modelled at a particular stage in history. The title 'saint' is not a reward for personal goodness; saints are canonised for the sake of the Church's mission. They are the heroes and heroines of the Church to whom we can look for vision, direction and inspiration. The radical nature of their lives helps to extend our horizons and show us the limitless possibilities for a life of faith. Here's an idea: Sift through the Church's tradition and find a saint who can identify with the particular life issues you are grappling with at present. (This may raise the need for more canonised saints who modelled marital virtues – an area for growth in our church.)

4. Saints leads us to grieve and heal

Remembrance of our ancestors in faith can be a painful time for those grieving the loss of a loved one, especially where regrets and 'unfinished business' are involved. With this in mind, we might use the month of November as an opportunity to bring before God all such regrets and to

pray for the healing of wounded relationships.

5. Saints are role models for our children

As Catholics we must hold up gospel role models to our children. That's why we name our children after saints – they are in a stronger position to guide our young people in the way of faith than the average football hero or pop-star. There is plenty of action in the lives of the saints to fire youthful imaginations. In fact, next time you are looking for a gift for a child or a youth, you might consider a storybook or video about a great saint. •

