

### Insights in Liturgy

#### Saints: Revealers Of Christ

By THOMAS J. DRISCOLL

The celebration of the feast of ALL Saints provides us an opportunity to reflect upon the place of the saints in Catholic Tradition. The true measure of holiness for us is Jesus Christ. Individual saints may be singled out as reflections of Christ's holiness lived out in particular times.

In biblical literature the members of the community were called "holy and elect", and the Church saw itself as the communion of saints. All who believed shared in the common fellowship of divine life and hence were regarded as saints. Saints, then, are witnesses to Jesus within the community.

Among the early witnesses to the Christian faith were the martyrs, who willingly offered their lives as a testimony of faith in the Risen Lord. Ignatius of Antioch (2nd. Century)

longed for martyrdom and entreated the community at Rome not to intervene in his favor with the authorities. The Martyrdom of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, is the first documentation of the veneration of martyrs. This source offers a profound insight into the relationship of the Lord to the saints. "For we worship this One as Son of God, but we love the martyrs as disciples and imitators of the Lord, deservedly so, because of their unsurpassable devotion to their own King and Teacher." (Martyrdom of Polycarp 17:3)

The history of the veneration of saints began with the cult of martyrs. As early as the second century the Eucharist was celebrated upon the tombs of famous martyrs. The day of a saints' martyrdom was celebrated as her birthday ("dies natalis"). In the early Church martyrdom was so strong as to be considered the perfection of the Christian life.

When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, the

persecution of Christians had ended, and martyrdom was no longer prevalent as the perfection of the Christian life. The Church Fathers began to describe radical Christian living itself as an unbloody martyrdom. The radical Christian life was (and still is) found among ascetics. Hundred of people fled the world and went to live in the desert, particularly in Egypt. Hermits such as Antony, Pachomius, and Simeon the Stylite lived an austere life of prayer, penance, and struggle with the devil in imitation of Christ. In the early Church, then, the two principle forms of holiness or sainthood were by means of martyrdom and asceticism.

As members of the Communion of Saints we share in the holiness of Jesus. Unlike the early church saints we may not have the opportunity to celebrate martyrdom as a witness to Jesus. However, we can and must emulate the early martyrs' faith in the Risen Lord. We may not be able to live alone in the desert but we are challenged to a simplicity of life style in opposition to the materialism of the world.

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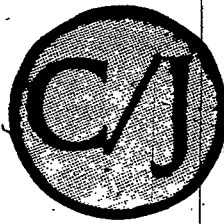
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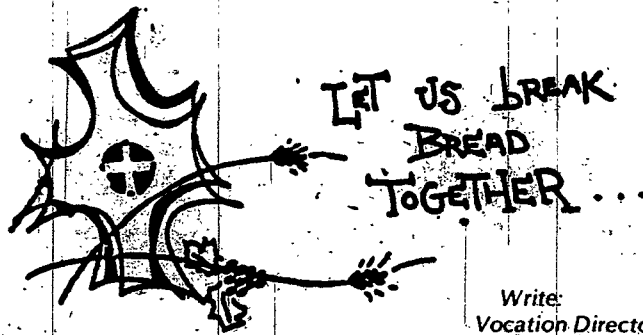


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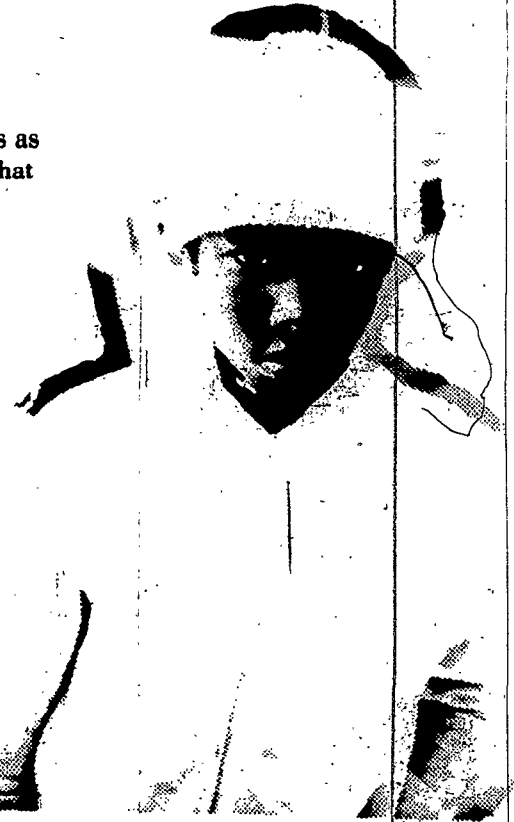
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