

“Saints risk everything to put the Gospel into practice.”

The month of November is a special time when we celebrate all the saints and remember the faithfully departed. As we remember all those who have gone before us, it is also a time for each one of us to pause and ask ourselves: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” “Which is the greatest commandment?”

On Sunday October 14, Pope Francis declared **Pope Paul VI**, the murdered Salvadoran **bishop Oscar Romero, Francesco Spinelli, Vincenzo Romano, Maria Caterina Kasper, Nazaria Ignazia of Saint Teresa of Jesus**, and **Nunzio Sulprizio** Saints. In his homily, the Pope invites all of us to strive to become saints by putting the Gospel first.

Excerpts from Pope Francis’ homily:

The Gospel, in particular, invites us to an encounter with the Lord, after the example of the “man” who “ran up to him” (cf. Mk 10:17). We can recognize ourselves in that man, whose name the text does not give, as if to suggest that he could represent each one of us. He asks Jesus how “to inherit eternal life” (v. 17). He is seeking life without end, life in its fullness: who of us would not want this? Yet we notice that he asks for it as an inheritance, as a good to be obtained, to be won by his own efforts. In fact, in order to possess this good, he has observed the commandments from his youth and to achieve this he is prepared to follow others; and so he asks: “What must I do to have eternal life?”

Jesus’s answer catches him off guard. The Lord looks upon him and loves him (cf. v. 21). Jesus changes the perspective: from commandments observed in order to obtain a reward, to a free and total love. That man was speaking in terms of supply and demand, Jesus proposes to him a story of love. He asks him to pass from the observance of laws to the gift of self, from doing for oneself to being with God. And the Lord suggests to the man a life that cuts to the quick: “Sell what you have and give to the poor...and come, follow me” (v. 21). To you, too, Jesus says: “Come, follow me!” Come: do not stand still, because it is not enough not to do evil in order to be with Jesus. Follow me: do not walk behind Jesus only when you want to, but seek him out every day; do not be content to keep the commandments, to give a little alms and say a few prayers: find in Him the God who always loves you; seek in Jesus the God who is the meaning of your life, the God who gives you the strength to give of yourself.

Jesus is radical. He gives all and he asks all: he gives a love that is total and asks for an undivided heart. Even today he gives himself to us as the living bread; can we give him crumbs in exchange? We cannot respond to him, who made himself our servant even going to the cross for us, only by observing some of the commandments. We cannot give him, who offers us eternal life, some odd moment of time. Jesus is not content with a “percentage of love”: we cannot love him twenty or fifty or sixty percent. It is either all or nothing.

The Gospel tells us that the man – “went away sorrowful” (v. 22). He was tied down to regulations of the law and to his many possessions; he had not given over his heart. Even though he had encountered Jesus and received his loving gaze, the man went away sad. Sadness is the proof of unfulfilled love, the sign of a lukewarm heart. On the other hand, a heart unburdened by possessions, that freely loves the Lord, always spreads joy, that joy for which there is so much need today. Pope Saint Paul VI wrote: “It is indeed in the midst of their distress that our fellow men need to know joy, to hear its song” (Gaudete in Domino, I). Today Jesus invites us to return to the source of joy, which is the encounter with him, the courageous choice to risk everything to follow him, the satisfaction of leaving something behind in order to embrace his way. The saints have travelled this path.

All these saints, he said, in different contexts, put today’s word into practice in their lives, without lukewarmness, without calculation, with the passion to risk everything and to leave it all behind. May the Lord help us to imitate their example.