

Today's feast makes me think of three people that I know fairly well. One of them is a priest who had a very difficult childhood. He lived in a country torn by war during his growing up years and was the only remaining member of his immediate family by the time he was 20. He teaches me about remaining grounded in prayer and relying on Jesus in the Eucharist. Another is a religious sister who died at 23, but taught me so much about what it means to be holy. Finally, there is this priest I know who did great work but also was very misunderstood by his superiors. Even when they limited his ministry, in his humility, he didn't fight them.

You may have heard of my friends. They are better known as St. John Paul II, St. Therese of Lisieux, also known as the "Little Flower" and St. Pio of Pietrelcina, or Padre Pio. These three spiritual giants and others have inspired me and countless other Christians in their journey of faith. Today we have the great opportunity to remember and honor all those ordinary men and women who, with God's grace, lived extraordinary lives.

These Saints are part of that great multitude that John saw in his visions recorded in the book of Revelation. They form a huge family gathering around the throne of God and are there for us constantly as we make our way through life. When we are at our darkest moments, they are there to pray for us and draw us close to Abba, close to our Heavenly Father whose love and mercy heal, protect, strengthen and save us. We ask for the saints' prayers just like we would turn to those we love here on earth for their prayers in our times of need.

The saints want to be those confidantes and friends we so desperately desire when everything is going wrong. They are also those that can share our joy when life is sweet. It is a privilege to have their friendship. The Church requires us to gather for Mass today to remind us of the great gift that the Saints in Heaven are to the Church.

I am sure many of you were as excited as I was about that thrilling Buckeye victory this past weekend in the Horseshoe. Imagine, though, how the game would have been different had the stadium been empty as they tried to overcome a fifteen-point deficit in the 4th quarter. Most likely, that comeback wouldn't have happened at all. And even if it had, would their celebration have been as sweet without the thousands of fans streaming onto the field to celebrate with them?

This is the reality of the saints for us. They want to be those who cheer us on in difficulty, support us in our struggles and share our joys. The question is, do we avoid or ignore them? Do we approach the challenges and victories of life as though we were in an empty stadium?

If so, let us make it our goal this month to get to know one of the many great saints our church recognizes. Even if we are in a place where we go to the Saints for their support, let us pray for the Holy Spirit to inspire in us one concrete way we can deepen our relationship with the saints.

If we desire the blessed life we hear about in the Gospel today, let us make it our goal to lean on the support of that cloud of Heavenly witnesses cheering us on and look to their example and prayers. If we do, one day we might be that example and support that future generations look to along with all the Saints.