

Dear Associates and Friends,

The Lord be with you.

You have finished your harvest of corn and rice. The mangos and coconuts are still maturing, and have some months of growth ahead of them. The rice sprouts have just been planted with the hope and promise of new life. These are the three stages of farm work: planting, growth, and harvesting.

Our Mass readings for this feast of All Saints reflect three stages of growth in Christian life.

First, Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount plants the seeds, which can grow into the Kingdom of God, into holiness. St. John in the second Reading speaks about being children of God now, and about growing in purity of heart, so that we might be transformed and come to see God as He is. The Book of Revelation celebrates the final stage of glory in heaven for the all of the saints, who worship God, praising and thanking God and the Lamb for their work of salvation.

Our Cistercian Fathers have given us a good number of sermons for the feast of All Saints, commenting especially on the Beatitudes in St. Matthew's Gospel. St. Bernard finds three stages of the monk's life in the Beatitudes—first, the beginner, then the one making progress, and finally the one coming to fulfillment.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, and those who mourn and who hunger and thirst for righteousness, because they are beginners on the path of conversion. The grace of repentance has revealed their spiritual poverty to them. They weep over their past sins and present woundedness. So they hunger and thirst for Christ's justice and healing.

Blessed are the merciful, because they are making progress—they have received God's mercy so they keep moving forward, growing in their own conversion and showing mercy to others.

Blessed are the pure of heart and the peacemakers, because they are in their own conversion and showing mercy to others.

Blessed are the pure of heart and the peacemakers, because they are coming closer to the fulfillment of their hope of seeing God and of becoming the children of God who share fully in Christ's glory and God's gift of eternal life.

St. Bernard was also able to condense St. Benedict's early chapter in his Rule for Monks about the Ladder of Humility into a similar pattern of three stages of growth: humility is truth, and there are three steps of truth. First, we learn the truth about ourselves, growing in humility. Then we realize the truth about our neighbor, growing in compassion. Finally, we behold God's Truth in Our Lord Jesus Christ, growing in contemplative prayer and union with God.

When St. Bernard encouraged and even commanded the young Aelred of Rievaulx to write a book entitled *The Mirror of Charity*, Aelred condensed St. Benedict's last chapter in his *Rule for Monks* about Good Zeal into three stages of growth in love.

St. Aelred compared those stages to the three Old Testament Sabbath rests. First, we work six days on coming into true love for ourselves, and so enter the 7th day of Sabbath rest. Next, we work six weeks on coming into true love for our neighbors, and so enter into the 7th week of Sabbath rest. Third, we work seven times seven years on coming into true love for God, and so enter into the Sabbath of Sabbaths, the 50th year of Sabbath rest, the Jubilee year. (Oh, that it would only take six days or only six weeks!)

Our Lord began His Gospel message with the Sermon on the Mount teaching seven or eight Beatitudes, revealing the true way to salvation. At the end of His ministry on earth, Jesus at the Last Supper boiled down His Gospel message into one new commandment, to love one another as He first loved us.

St. Benedict begins his *Rule for Monasteries* with twelve steps of a Ladder of Humility. He ends his Holy Rule with ten steps of Good Zeal—a Ladder of Love.

Our fathers, Sts. Bernard and Aelred boiled down St. Benedict's Ladders of Humility and Love into three steps of truth and three steps of love.

What is constant in the teaching of Our Lord and St. Benedict, of Sts. Bernard and Aelred is the idea of growth-growing in the Christian life. St. Gregory of Nyssa says that the perfection of Christian life is to keep growing always—do not stop or stagnate in following Christ.

What is also constant in their teaching is the fact that we cannot begin, or grow, or reach fulfillment in the spiritual life by our own human efforts alone. We need a Redeemer and Savior each step on our way. We need the grace of Christ to jump start us into conversion. We need Christ's grace to keep prodding us to grow. In the end we need the grace of Christ to complete His work of salvation by bringing us through the grace of a happy death to share fully in His glory and the beatitudes of all the saints in the Kingdom of Heaven.

In the Sacred Heart,

Fr Cyprian