

- Have you ever had one of those weeks when it seems that the burdens of life are much greater than your capacity to deal with them well?
- I'll spare you the gory details of the difficult matters that have been dropped at my feet this week, but suffice it to say that at many points this week my heart was heavy and my patience was worn thin.
- Yet in the midst of this very difficult week we had two very glorious feast days: All Saints Day and All Souls Day! While feast days are generally pretty busy days for us priests, they are also very grace-filled days.
- What I love about these twin feast days is that they present us with ultimate realities and challenge us to live our faith with integrity in response to these ultimate realities.
- Both of these feasts present us with the fact that one day we're all going to have to face our Maker, and that can either be a very good day, or the most awful day of all. These are feasts that remind us that death comes for us all.
- Yet the focus on death that's brought to bear by All Saints Day and All Souls Day is not at all macabre or maudlin. No, these feast days call us to look beyond the finitude of earthly existence to see what lies beyond that great veil separating us from eternity – sort of a preview of coming attractions!
- On All Saints Day, we see the glory of the new and heavenly Jerusalem, the home for which we've all been created. And through this feast we are reminded of what it is that we hope for in the depths of our souls: an eternal and loving union with our Triune Lord!
- All Saints Day reminds us of the reward that awaits those who run the race of life heroically: glorious sainthood!
- And on All Souls Day, we are reminded of our solemn duty to pray for those who have gone before us through that great veil separating us from eternity, so that they, too, might be purified of their sins and enjoy that new and heavenly Jerusalem.
- In short, these are not feasts for atheists or agnostics! Oh no, they are bold feasts that loudly proclaim our faith in God and in His justice and mercy.
- They are feasts that call us to look beyond this visible, earthly existence to see with the eyes of faith that invisible, eternal world that is so much more real than the visible world around us.
- They are feasts that remind us that Catholicism is not just a faith or set of beliefs or even a way of life. It's also a distinct vision or perception of the world in which we live.
- And if we're going to count ourselves as members of this one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church, then we need to live our faith with zeal and integrity.
- In our Gospel today Jesus takes the scribes and Pharisees to task because they do not practice what they preach. They are people whose outward practice of their faith belies their true beliefs and behaviors, and Jesus tells the crowd around Him not to be like them.
- Rather, He encourages the people to live with integrity, to be willing to serve others, and to be humble.
- The implication for us, of course, is to do the same: to be authentic in our practice of the faith, to practice our Catholic faith with integrity. So what does that mean?
- Certainly living our Catholic faith with integrity means that we should do our best to follow the Commandments and the tenets and precepts of our faith. But that's just the tip of the iceberg!

- If you're simply doing what the Church tells you without fully understanding the reasoning behind it all, you are missing out! It is not enough to live by the letter of the law; to live your faith with integrity you must understand the spirit of the law.
- But even with that said, there's much more to Catholicism than the law. It's even more than just a way of life. Catholicism is a distinct way of seeing and experiencing our surroundings.
- To be specific, it's a matter of seeing as God Himself sees. It's a spiritual sensibility in which we experience this world and its history not just as a series of events, but as a loving encounter with God.
- To put it very simply, as Catholics we believe that Almighty God created the world and everything in it; that He made man to enjoy this creation, and to love Him and serve Him. But of his own free will man sinned, and so evil entered into the world.
- Yet God did not give up on man, and through His prophets He called His chosen people to a life of freedom from sin, setting before them His laws to guide them. Sometime His people were obedient, but oftentimes they weren't.
- So in order to save us from ourselves, God Himself became man in the person of Jesus Christ. He took on our flesh, and through this flesh offered on the altar of the cross, Jesus redeemed us all. By His suffering and death, He made salvation a possibility for all men.
- And now each of us must choose by the way we live our life if we're going to accept this gift of redemption or not. We can either choose to live in the light of God's love and mercy by loving and obeying Him, or we can turn to the darkness of sin and the misery it brings.
- Yet as long as we live on this earth, none of us is ever beyond God's mercy. We always have the chance to turn back to God's love and mercy, no matter how far we stray.
- But beware: the more we stray, and the more seriously we stray, the more difficult it becomes to trust in His mercy. And this is important, because each of us will one day have to face our Creator and make an accounting for our lives. And as I said earlier, that can either be a very good day, or the most awful day of all.
- When we're living our faith as we should, we begin to see all things and all people as part of this great drama of creation, sin, redemption and sanctification! And this helps us to put everything in its proper perspective – most especially our sufferings and burdens.
- So many times this week as difficult things came into my life – even petty little annoyances – I had to remind myself of this big picture of sin and redemption, and try to see each burden as a cross to be embraced . . . as an opportunity to unite myself with Christ in His suffering.
- I had to try to see each person as a fellow athlete struggling to complete this marathon race of life, as a person loved by God and created by God for Heaven!
- Truly, if we could just see the beautiful dignity God has bestowed on each soul, we would never be able to treat each other badly, nor could we wish anyone anything but salvation.
- Brothers and sisters, we are the Church of saints and sinners, and we are all players in the great drama of man's salvation. So I encourage you: practice your faith with integrity. Give God what belongs to Him, which is your fidelity and love.
- And as you do, look beyond the here and now of this world to see the world that is to come. Try to see the big picture: that everything that happens to us in this life, whether good or bad, is permitted by God to help us get to Heaven.
- When we do this, seeing all things with the eyes of faith, it's then that we find that our Lord's yoke is easy and His burden is light.