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All Saints, All Souls feasts are time to renew hope, pope says

Cindy Wooden Catholic News Service | Nov. 1, 2013 The Francis Chronicles

At the end of the feast of All Saints, just before the sun set, Pope Francis celebrated an outdoor Mass at Rome's Verano cemetery and urged Christians to hang on to hope as they reflect on the promise that earthly life ends with eternal life in heaven.

In his homily at the evening Mass on Friday, Pope Francis set aside his prepared text, looked out at the thousands of people gathered between long lines of tombs and told them, "We reflect and think about our own future and about all those who have gone before us and are now with the Lord."

"The Lord God, beauty, goodness, truth, tenderness, the fullness of love -- all that awaits us," the pope said. "And all those who preceded us and died in the Lord are there," in heaven with God.

Even the best of the saints were not saved by their good works, the pope said, but by the blood of Christ.

"God is the one who saves, he is the one who carries us like father -- at the end of our lives -- to that heaven where our forebears are," he said.

The feast day reading from the seventh chapter of the Book of Revelation described a multitude of people from every race and nation standing before God. They were dressed in white, the pope said, because they were "washed in the blood of the Lamb. We can enter into heaven only thanks to the blood of the lamb, the blood of Christ."

"If today we are remembering these brothers and sisters of ours who lived before us and are now in heaven, they are there because they were washed in the blood of Christ," he said. "That is our hope, and this hope does not disappoint. If we live our lives with the Lord, he will never disappoint us."

"We are children of God," he said, and live in hope of one day seeing God as he is.

"On the feast of All Saints and before the Day of the Dead, it is important to think about hope," he said.

The early Christians used an anchor as a symbol of hope, he said, and "to have our hearts anchored up there where our loved ones are, where the saints are, where Jesus is, where God is -- that is hope. That is the hope that doesn't disappoint."

The feasts of All Saints and All Souls are "days of hope," he said. The virtue of "hope is like a bit of leaven that enlarges your soul. There are difficult moments in life, but with hope you go forward and keep your eyes on what awaits us. Today is a day of hope; our brothers and sisters are in the presence of God, and we, too, will be there in the Lord's arms if we follow the path of Jesus."

"Before sunset today, each one of us can think of the sunset of our lives," the pope said. "Do we look forward to it with hope and with the joy of being welcomed by the Lord?"

Throughout Italy, like in many predominantly Catholic countries, people take advantage of the All Saints public holiday to tidy up and take flowers to the graves of their loved ones on the eve of the Nov. 2 celebration of All Souls' Day. After the Mass, Pope Francis was to visit some of those graves, praying for the deceased and blessing their tombs.

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