

In director Danny Boyle's 2005 film *Millions*, Damian Cunningham is a seven-year-old boy recently made motherless who sees and talks with Saints. One day, as Damian sits in a cardboard fort he built next to local train tracks, a massive sack of money falls as if from the sky and lands on him, destroying the box. Damian, convinced that the money is from God, wants to use it to help people. Anthony, his older brother, wants to use it to buy electronic gadgets and to impress his peers. Eventually we learn that the money was thrown from a passing train by robbers to be collected later. Damian must decide quickly what to do with his cash: the money is in the English currency of pounds sterling and England is about to change to the Euro. In just one week, his millions of pounds sterling will be worthless. As he engages in ethical and moral struggles with his brother, Damian entertains a series of visions: He talks with St. Francis of Assisi about his miracle of healing a leper and his work to help the poor. He talks with the Martyrs of Uganda about their miracle of healing those infected with the bubonic plague from filthy drinking water and the need for cheap, clean water wells. He talks with St. Peter about the miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand and how a little boy helped Jesus with his lunch. At different times he also talks with St. Joseph and St. Nicholas and their protection of the innocent and the needy. From time to time, as Damian speaks with the saints, he asks about his mother. "Have you seen a St. Maureen," he asks. "She hasn't been there very long," he tells them. He is worried because he knows that to be declared a saint you have to perform a miracle, and he is not sure that his mother ever did.

Today we commemorate All Saints' Day, which falls every year on November 1 but can be translated to the following Sunday. On this major Feast Day, we give thanks to God for all the men and women He made especially holy. During and after the Neronian Persecution of the Christians in Rome in 64 AD, the men and women who followed the Way of Jesus gathered in the subterranean catacombs around the tomb that held the body of

a Christian martyr. There, on the date of that martyr's "heavenly birthday," they celebrated the Eucharist: they gathered as One Body around the sanctified body of their beloved spiritual hero. Over time, as the number of martyrs and other saints increased, the Church ran out of days to honor each specific saint. As a result, in the seventh century Pope Boniface IV rededicated the Pantheon in Rome in memory of all Christian martyrs and thus initiated the Feast of All Saints. It is true that, in the words of the beloved hymn about the saints, "they lived not only in ages past, there are hundreds of thousands still." It is true that when you and I were baptized, we were made one of God's saints, being "sealed by the Holy Spirit [...] and marked as Christ's own forever." But there is something important about commemorating those who lay down their lives for Christ Who lay down His for us. There is something important about giving thanks to God for those who gave all that they were and all that they had to the God who continually gives Himself to us. Their deaths reframe our perspective on earthly life: they point the way to a kind of life that is eternal. From the saints we discern that there is more to life than we can see, feel, or experience; from them we are reminded that there is more to life than our temporary moments of happiness or suffering.

This may help us understand why today's Gospel reading which, specifically chosen for the Feast of All Saints, features Lazarus whom Jesus brings back to life. You will remember that Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha enjoy a different level of friendship with Jesus; John writes that Jesus loved them especially. After Lazarus dies from an illness, Jesus travels to their home. He speaks with Martha and Mary and then, as He stands before the tomb of one of His best friends, He weeps. Even though four days have passed since Lazarus died, Jesus commands the tomb's stone be removed and then commands Lazarus to come out. And, still swathed in the cloth in which he was buried, Lazarus does. It is important to understand what has happened here. Lazarus has been revived, but he has not

been Resurrected. On Easter, Christ rose with a renewed, immortal, and incorruptible Body; on the Cross and from the Empty Tomb He conquered sin, evil, and death; He ascended with that Body into Heaven to sit in glory at the right hand of the Father; one day, in that same Body, He will come again to raise up and glorify all who follow Him to be like Him. That is what Resurrection looks like. But Lazarus is not resurrected; he is reanimated. His soul has re-embraced his body, his mind and consciousness has been restored, and his relationship with his sisters has been renewed, but one day he will again die. In fact, in the following chapter, John describes that the same priests and Pharisees who sought to kill Jesus seek to kill Lazarus because his return to life turned so many to Jesus. We do not know what happened next to Lazarus, but we do know what happened eventually even to him. Lazarus, therefore, is an icon of how quickly and continually we oscillate between joy and pain, grief and comfort, life and death. We read about Lazarus on All Saints' Day because, like the saints, Lazarus powerfully instructs us that life is not limited to the rhythms of joy and sorrow that mark our time until we are out of time. Instead, Lazarus and the saints emphasize that while every day, every blessing, and every relationship is a gift from God that we hold for only a little while, God their Giver is constantly and permanently trustworthy. They underscore how even though moments of disappointment, frustration, heartbreak, and loss may mark a chapter change in our life's story, God's healing grace and providence leads us through and beyond our suffering. God is our sanity in this life, and He has greater things prepared for us in the next. Therefore, following the path forged by Christ and voyaged by the saints, we pray for the grace to focus on the things that last: the love of God that gives us grace to love others; the mercy of God which gives us grace to show mercy to others; and the lavish, selfless, prodigal generosity of God which gives us grace to share all that we are and all that we have with Him and with others in His Name.

When I was four years old, my family and I began to attend St. Peter's Episcopal church in Oakland, California. As if it happened yesterday, I remember a ritual I followed as a little boy after the service ended. I ran downstairs to the Parish Hall for our Coffee Hour which was hosted by different families who signed up to provide and serve coffee, tea, lemonade, and a sheet cake. Before I dove into the goodies or played with my friends, my attention was always arrested by a small display cabinet that held a variety of boxes of thank you cards and stationery. Perhaps what drew me to that glass cabinet was the person behind it: the ever-smiling Mrs. Breiling. She was an energetic woman with sparkling blue eyes; I remember that on top of her curly white hair she always wore a white, lace head-covering as was the custom at the time. Together, we would examine the ever-changing collection of cards and discuss their relative merits. I was always partial to anything with puppies. Sometimes my parents would give me some money to buy a box. What I did not know—nor could I have understood had I known—was that sweet Mrs. Breiling was a millionaire: a multi-millionaire, in fact. She and her brother had inherited oil wells in Texas and Arkansas. I also did not know that, in addition to supplying and staffing the thank you card display, she had been quietly generous to our church and its programs in ways great and small for years. And I had no way of knowing—and did not find out until her death two months before I was ordained—that would make it possible for me to attend seminary. Whenever we pray for the repose of the souls of our loved ones who through their simple gifts have made miracles happen in our lives, Mrs. Breiling always comes to mind. Through her cards and through her gifts, she showed me new ways to say “Thank you.” After her death, I also learned that she had a favorite saying: “There are no pockets in shrouds.” Life is a miracle—a gift—on loan to us for our enjoyment and for the benefit of others. Saints teach us that one day we shall leave it all behind; one day, we will exchange everything we possessed for a few moments of time for a vision of God, who lasts forever.

Toward the end of the film, Damian finally sees his mother: he sees her as a saint. They talk for a bit about the money and everything that happened because of it. But then Damian asks her what miracle she did to make her a saint. She replies, “Don’t you know? It was you.” When we finally see God, surrounded by all the martyrs and other saints He made—both great and small—we might wonder which of their many miracles gave Him the greatest joy. And if we do, He will say, “Didn’t you know? It was you.”