

**REQUIEM MASS FOR
FATHER JOHN EDVARD ALTBERG
SAINT JOSEPH PARISH 7/8/2017
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
I THESSALONIANS 4.13-18 St. JOHN 14.1-6**



We love to sing about the Saints of God...they lived long ago...they are millions living today...and they are just like us...and we want to be just like them.

What does it mean to be a Saint of God? We think of saints as people with extraordinary gifts who are pictured on holy cards...or who are given the honorific title "Saint" by the Church. Who are the Saints of God, really? How do we know them?

Father John Edvard Altberg, was a Saint of God during his lifetime...he remains a Saint of God still...in the wonderful fellowship called the Communion of Saints...Saints of God living and dead. Death does not dissolve our union with the people connected for all time by Faith in Jesus Christ.

Father John would not want the focus of this homily to be on him. That's hard to do for a man who was indeed extraordinary and gifted and whose life touched so many of us...and made us better for knowing him. He would want us to focus on the lessons we just heard...and the hope we have...and then go and tell others...so they too might have hope.

Hope is the basic message Christianity offers the world and it is what has brought us together in this place today. The Requiem Mass is really for us...about the strength and hope we get from what Saint Paul tells us we know...the truth about those who have died...our sadness at the suddenness of Father John's death...is tempered by our hope in the Resurrection...this is not the end...we will see Father John and all our loved ones again.

Jesus tells us not to be worried or upset about our friends and family who have died. He said, *"I have gone to make room for you in my Father's house. I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am."* Our hope that we will see Father John and all of our family and friends again in heaven is more than just a nice thought...Jesus promised it to those who die believing in him...and Jesus keeps his promises.

In the Book of Revelation, Saint John writes about the wonderful vision of heaven he experienced while on the Island of Patmos, *"Never again will they hunger or thirst; neither sun nor any scorching heat will burn them, because the Lamb, who is in the center of the throne, will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*

Father John Altberg was a shepherd who cared for the sheep at Saint Joseph Parish in San Mateo for 19 years. He cared for many other family and friends outside the Parish who relied on his wisdom and practical advice to help them through life's twists and turns...simply put...he practiced Christian love.

Christian love is all about taking action...trying to do the right thing for everyone at all times...and it is what defined Father John as a good and compassionate priest. Christian love...never dies...Father John's love for each of us will remain strong in our hearts forever.

The sadness we feel today is turned into great joy when we meditate on Saint John's vision of heaven...and by Saint Paul's words of reassurance...and by Jesus' promise to us that all who die believing in him will be with him in heaven...together with all of the Angels and Saints. Father John will be there too and it will be good to see him again.

While we haven't yet experienced the heaven of Saint John's vision, we should also remember what the author of Hebrews writes, *"To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot yet see."*

Father John Altberg knew what it meant to be a Saint of God. He was husband, father, brother, grandfather, uncle, priest, and good friend to many. He lived his life with a clear understanding Sainthood doesn't stop at death. He was happy to tell others why he believed heaven is the better alternative to non-existence.

When we leave here today we can sing about all of the Saints of God...and give strength and support to each other...because we know the truth about those who have died. We are people of hope!

