

## Homily for All Saints' Day 2018

### "I'm Dr. Cohen"

We celebrate today all the ordinary women and men who have passed over to live with God forever. Some of them may have been your teachers, your parents, a departed spouse, a neighbor. That inspires two stories:

First, there is an ancient legend in the Jewish mystical tradition of the "lamed-vovniks" – the 36 people in every generation who live lives of righteousness with the result that, no matter how debased and barbaric the rest of the world becomes, God still loves the world and does not destroy it. The legend says that the identity of the thirty-six is completely unknown. And it goes on to say that "Since nobody knows who the *Lamedvavniks* are, not even themselves, every Jew should act *as if* he or she might be one of them; that is, lead a holy and humble life and pray for the sake of fellow human beings."

The second story is more recent:

When Robert Bowers was brought into the emergency room in Pittsburgh last Saturday after killing eleven people at the Tree of Life Synagogue, he was shouting, "I want to kill all the Jews." A few days later, with Bowers's condition stabilized, Dr. Jeffrey Cohen, the hospital's president who is himself Jewish and a member of Tree of Life congregation, stopped in to see how he was doing. The Washington Post picks up the story:

*Cohen is personally connected to the shooting beyond his role at the hospital. He lives so close to Tree of Life synagogue that he heard the gunshots as the massacre unfolded. He knew nine of the people who were killed, he told the Tribune-Review.*

*Still that didn't stop him from going to check in on Bowers to ask him whether he was in pain. The man said he was fine.*

*"He asked me who I was, I said 'I'm Dr. Cohen, the president of the hospital,' " Cohen said. "And I turned around and left."*

*And the FBI agent that was guarding him said, 'I don't know that I could have done that.' "*

To return to the legend:

"Since nobody knows who the *Lamedvavniks* are, not even themselves, every Jew should act *as if* he or she might be one of them; that is, lead a holy and humble life and pray for the sake of fellow human beings."

Us, too.