

FIRST READING – ALL SAINTS

A reading from the book of Revelation.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

I, John, saw an angel
ascending from the rising of the sun,
having the seal of the living God,
and he called with a loud voice to the four angels
who had been given power to damage earth and sea, saying,
“Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees,
until we have marked the servants of our God
with a seal on their foreheads.”
And I heard the number of those who were sealed,
one hundred forty-four thousand,
sealed out of every tribe of the people of Israel:
After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count,
from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,
standing before the throne and before the Lamb,
robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.
They cried out in a loud voice, saying,
“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne,
and to the Lamb!”
And all the angels stood around the throne
and around the elders and the four living creatures;
they fell on their faces before the throne
and worshipped God, singing,
“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom
and thanksgiving and honour and power and might
be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”
Then one of the elders addressed me,
“Who are these, robed in white,
and where have they come from?”

I said to him, “Sir, you are the one that knows.”
Then he said to me,
“These are they who have come out of the great ordeal;
they have washed their robes
and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”



Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING – ALL SAINTS

A reading from the first letter of Saint John.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Beloved:

See what love the Father has given us,
that we should be called children of God;
and that is what we are.

The reason the world does not know us
is that it did not know him.

Beloved, we are God's children now;
what we will be has not yet been revealed.

What we do know is this:
when he is revealed, we will be like him,
for we will see him as he is.

And all who have this hope in God purify themselves,
just as he is pure.



PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – ALL SAINTS

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain;
and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.
Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:
“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will receive mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you
and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.
Rejoice and be glad,
for your reward is great in heaven.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

All Saints' Day ... marks the transition from the earlier part of the post-Pentecost season, with its emphasis on growth in grace, to the last Sundays of the Church year, when the emphasis shifts to the "last things," the final consummation of history.

It is not entirely clear whom we are to include in this celebration. Originally it was a commemoration of early martyrs whose names were unrecorded and who therefore were not, and could not be, included by name on the day of their martyrdom. They were not, in the language of the later West, officially "canonized," although they may have qualified if anything had been known about them.

Yet, the New Testament calls all baptized Christians "saints," *hagioi*, holy ones. Even in writing to the Corinthians, whom he has to castigate for the worst possible moral offenses, Paul can call them "saints" (1 Corinthians 1:2; the Greek means "called as saints," not just "called to be saints," as the RSV translates it).

Their sanctity was not a moral achievement, not even the complete triumph of grace in their lives, but rested upon their having been made objectively holy by baptism (see 1 Corinthians 6:11).

Yet, it was a natural development that the term "saint" should have come to be reserved for those in whom grace had its most signal triumph, for those who had achieved the Pauline imperative "Become what you are."

In the light of this New Testament doctrine, All Saints' Day could be interpreted as a commemoration of all the faithful departed. But the Church has traditionally separated this wider commemoration from All Saints' Day and observed it on the day following. Thus she has drawn a distinction between those for whom she finds it natural to thank God for the victory they have achieved by his grace, and those for whom she finds it more fitting to pray that God have mercy on them in "that day" (see 2 Timothy 1:18).

Reading I: Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14

The Book of Revelation is not meant to be a timeless description of what it is like in heaven. Like all apocalyptic literature, it was written to encourage the faithful in a time of great distress.

Writing about A.D. 96, John the Seer expects a great persecution to break out against the Church in Asia Minor. Many Christians will die a martyr's death. He seeks to assure them that this outburst of hostility against the Christian community (by the emperor Domitian?) is the prelude of the End, when God will vindicate his martyrs.

So the seer describes the triumphant state that awaits them in this symbolic language of white robes, palms, etc., and pictures them as singing the song of triumph that was

probably sung in the Church on earth (perhaps a paschal hymn), “Salvation belongs to our God ... Amen! Blessing and glory ... !”

If we take the seer’s words literally, he was mistaken in thinking that his crisis was the last of the crises before the End. But that is the literary method of all apocalypses. Each succeeding crisis in the Church’s history confronts us with the eternal issues of life and death.

History is a struggle between good and evil in which, through the victory of Christ, the victory of the faithful is assured. Meanwhile, in the very midst of her tribulations on earth, the martyr Church already sings the songs of victory in her liturgy.

In another way, too, the Church is an anticipation of the kingdom of heaven. For she, too, is a pluralistic fellowship consisting of “people from every nation, race, tribe and language.”

Responsorial Psalm: 24:1-4b, 5-6

This psalm is of a liturgical type, not an expression of personal piety like many of the psalms. It was probably used in early days to accompany a procession of the ark to the temple.

Two choirs sing antiphonally. One asks, Who is worthy to ascend the hill of the Lord? The other replies, Those who have the necessary moral qualities.

When Psalm 24 is used as a response to Revelation 7 on All Saints’ Day, the temple becomes a figure for the consummated kingdom of heaven. Those deemed worthy to enter are the Christian saints.

Reading II: 1 John 3:1-3

The first letter of John was written to condemn the false teachings that were afflicting the churches around A.D. 100. This heresy involved a denial of the true humanity of Christ and a wrong understanding of Christian existence. This passage is concerned with the second aspect.

The false teachers represented some kind of gnosticizing movement. They based their system of beliefs on what they claimed to be a revealed “gnosis,” or knowledge. They claimed that they were already perfected, and therefore had no need to make any moral effort.

Against such teaching our author insists on the element of the “not yet” in the Christian life. It does not yet appear what it shall be. To be a child of God already here and now is only an advance installment of our final salvation.

The writer is making the same point that Paul was making when he called the gift of the Spirit a “down payment.” The final consummated state is, for the Christian, still a matter of hope. Meanwhile, the present task should be to purify oneself from sin as Christ is pure.

Note also the element of healthy agnosticism in this author’s description of the future state. He cannot describe it, except to say that “we shall be like him.”

That warns us to take the language of the Apocalypse, not as a literal description, but as valuable hints that suggest a truth to be grasped intuitively, though incapable of definition. It is enough to know that we, and all the saints, shall be “like him.”

Are we to suppose that the saints are already “like him”? Or do they, too, have to wait until he appears? Holy Scripture gives no clear answer.

We are told all that we need to know for our present existence. We have been made God’s children; we have a hope of achieving the ultimate destiny for which we were created, and meanwhile our task is to strive for purity of life.

Gospel: Matthew 5:1-12a

The beatitudes form the opening of the Great Sermon. In Matthew it is the Sermon on the Mount, in Luke the Sermon on the Plain. Matthew’s purpose in choosing this location is that he understands the teaching of the sermon as the new law, corresponding to the old law given on Mount Sinai, and for him Jesus is the second Moses, the giver of the new law.

Each of the beatitudes falls into two parts. The first part describes the humiliation of the present, the second the glory to come. The beatitudes are addressed, not to all people indiscriminately, but to the disciples, to those who have left all to follow Jesus.

Note that in Luke the beatitudes are all in the second person plural. Here Luke is probably original, for the “you” style has survived in the last of Matthew’s beatitudes.

So Jesus is addressing those who have left all to follow him. They are the poor—in spirit, as Matthew correctly explains. They are the ones who realize that they are spiritually the have-nots, who have no righteousness of their own, and therefore they hunger and thirst for (God’s) righteousness.

The second group of beatitudes is more activist. It is the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers who are pronounced blessed. Faith, if it is genuine, works through love, as Paul put it.

It is those who combine both the passive and active sides of a true relation to God who are pronounced, already here and now, to be blessed, and promised future participation in the kingdom of God.

It has often been observed that the beatitudes describe the life of Christ himself. He was all the things and did all the things the beatitudes enumerate. And that brought him to the cross, and beyond that to the resurrection.

All Saints' Day suggests the further thought that the saints are those who most perfectly manifested the Christ-like character described in the first part of the beatitudes, and who therefore now partake of the promises in the second part: Theirs is the kingdom of heaven; they are now comforted; they have inherited the "land," ha-aretz, the promised land of the kingdom of God; they are filled with the delights of the messianic banquet; they have obtained mercy; they have achieved the full potentialities of divine filiation.

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