

FIRST READING: Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14

A reading from the Book of Revelation:

I, John, saw another angel come up from the East, holding the seal of the living God. He cried out in a loud voice to the four angels who were given power to damage the land and the sea, "Do not damage the land or the sea or the trees until we put the seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." I heard the number of those who had been marked with the seal, one hundred and forty-four thousand marked from every tribe of the children of Israel. After this I had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb." All the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They prostrated themselves before the throne, worshiped God, and exclaimed: "Amen. Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving, honor, power, and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen." Then one of the elders spoke up and said to me, "Who are these wearing white robes, and where did they come from?" I said to him, "My lord, you are the one who knows." He said to me, "These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb."

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 24:1bc-2, 3-4ab, 5-6

Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face.

The LORD's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it. For he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face.

Who can ascend the mountain of the LORD? or who may stand in his holy place? One whose hands are sinless, whose heart is clean, who desires not what is vain.

Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face.

He shall receive a blessing from the LORD, a reward from God his savior. Such is the race that seeks him, that seeks the face of the God of Jacob.

Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face.

SECOND READING: John 3:1-3

A reading from the first Letter of Saint John:

Beloved: See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so 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 shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure, as he is pure.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: Matthew 5:1-12a

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the Feast of All Saints

This feast has a history. Originally this celebration, or special remembrance, was intended to commemorate all the unknown martyrs of the early church. Over the years it became transformed to include all those whom the church has declared to be sharing eternal life. There is a lengthy and rigorous process for this that the Church calls Beatification. It is a closed process by a chosen group. All the evidence of the dead one's life undergoes scrutiny to determine if there is any indication that the person now shares eternal life with God. Since all people, by nature, are sinners, this process reveals the grace of God to forgive. Google can provide extensive information on this subject.

As we speak English, we talk about Saints for, as far as I know, English is the only language with this specific word. It comes from the French word sainte which is the French word for holy. There are three stages in the process of beatification: venerable, blessed and holy. We employ the first two descriptions but adopt a special word, saint, for holy. We take the word saint as a title. Holy is merely a description. To put this in grammatical terms, holy is an adjective that modifies a person's name. Saint is a noun that can use the person's name to modify it. We all can say about someone, "So and so's a saint," but what we really mean is, "So and so is holy." Only God is holy, though. Holiness is not something any of us can make, earn or deserve. Holiness is only through God's abiding presence in our lives.

Before the Church began to declare a person to have gained eternal life, the description holy was ascribed to the living members of the Church. Paul called those to whom he wrote the holy ones. Jesus stated that salvation was through faith in God and in him. Through Baptism, a person becomes holy through salvation and receives the promise of eternal life. Paul excoriated the Corinthians for their sins, but still called them holy. God forgives sinners and makes them holy. It is God's love and presence that constitute holiness. It doesn't come any other way; it is God's gift to us. The feast of the saints is not so much about them and their good deeds and sacrifice; it's about the saving love of God and God's gifts to us.

This is a stray thought. Why do we remember the saints? We can think of them as heroes; those who have won the battle against sin. We remember, instead, the triumph over sin that Jesus won by his death. The saints share in eternal life because Jesus rose from the dead. This is the triumph of God. We triumph over sin and death only with, through and in Jesus as God's loving gift, not through anything we do, make or earn.

When we die, part of Jesus' promise of eternal life is rest and peace for all eternity as we live with God. Poor St. Anthony; he has none of those things. Think of all the millions, billions and trillions of things he's had to look for and then find! That poor guy has to work harder than anyone alive and forever. I don't know about you, but that sounds more like hell than heaven! Perhaps we are too bogged down by our own expectations and traditions. Maybe we all need to approach this issue from the perspective of Jesus. We seek God's presence and in that search, we share God's gift of eternal life, now. God's presence is holiness, or to us a glimpse of what eternal life and the Kingdom of God will be, as we live as God's Holy Ones. We have all we need; God's gift of faith.

The book of Revelation or as it used to be called, the Apocalypse, is about the end of the age when Jesus will return to complete the foundation of the Kingdom of God. It is more than that. It is about how Jesus will save us on the way to that event. The coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost began the founding of it. The book addressed a coming persecution. Was it a single event of decimation? Did it predict a recurring theme of persecution throughout history? We cannot know for Revelation doesn't say, for sure. We can, however, infer that, since the kingdom is in the process of unfolding, salvation for it is also unfolding. A look at the Church's story may be helpful.

The Church survived early persecution despite the martyrdom of many. The Church has survived many such crises with external and internal threats through the grace of God. Here we are today and don't we face our own, social, political, environmental and health crises? The book of Revelation has relevance for us with its powerful message; Jesus has won! Salvation, eternal life and the kingdom of God are ours now and in the life and Kingdom that will come.

God's Kingdom continues to unfold through the Church. It's hard to see through an imperfect medium; a looming institution and its stumbling, bumbling, inept and sinful clergy and laity. The historian, Kenneth Scott Latourette, wrote a two volume, "A History of Christianity." I've read the two volumes at least twice. It was a good read; I couldn't put it down. That the Church has survived for two millennia is a sign of God's saving and amazing grace. God has worked in the lives of those who have preceded us in death. God works through us as we live. God will continue to work through those who are yet to be born. We know this through God's gift of faith. We live by faith, not our gut and feelings and we see through eyes of faith. Paul wrote that we carry in our bodies a treasure. We are earthen vessels for God's life and grace.

None of us can know the future for it has not yet happened. We remember the past, but can never relive it. We live now. The present moment may change and bring new things, some we like and some we don't. Through it all, God is near. There is a poem-prayer that describes this mystery written by Helen Mallicoat. I was regretting the past and fearing the future. Suddenly my Lord was speaking: "My name is I AM." He paused. I waited; He continued, "When you live in the past with its mistakes and regrets it is hard. I am not there. My name is not I WAS. When you live in the future, with its problems and fears, it is hard. I am not there. My name is not I

WILL BE. When you live in this moment it is not hard. I am here. My name is I AM.” That’s how the saints have lived. We can learn from their example.

I read an interesting commentary on the Beatitudes. There has always been a controversy on whether to translate the Greek word MAKARIOS as happy or blessed. If the translation uses happy, it is not like hearing a joke. It is a happiness that only God may give making it a blessing. The commentator pointed out that in the time and place of Jesus, first century Palestine, this same quality would be defined as honorable. To be a person of honor was the quality that drove people’s lives. Worthy of honor are the poor, meek and hungry. It describes the quality that drives these individuals in living. It leads them to seek justice and compassion for others. What drives us? God’s grace or our desires?

To honor the dead as being in God’s presence for all eternity is useless if we fail to know God’s presence in ours. God saves, forgives and loves with infinite, eternal and unconditional compassion. Salvation by our God unfolds as we live. Sainthood is not so much our goal but holiness, which is God’s living presence, is now.

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