

1 November – All Saints A – B – C

First reading *Apocalypse 7:2-4.9-14*

I, John, saw another angel rising where the sun rises, carrying the seal of the living God; he called in a powerful voice to the four angels whose duty it was to devastate land and sea, "Wait before you do any damage on land or at sea or to the trees, until we have put the seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." Then I heard how many were sealed: a hundred and forty-four thousand, out of all the tribes of Israel. After that I saw a huge number, impossible to count, of people from every nation, race, tribe and language; they were standing in front of the throne and in front of the Lamb, dressed in white robes and holding palms in their hands. They shouted aloud, "Victory to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels who were standing in a circle round the throne, surrounding the elders and the four animals, prostrated themselves before the throne, and touched the ground with their foreheads, worshipping God with these words. "Amen."

Praise and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and strength to our God for ever and ever. Amen." One of the elders then spoke, and asked me, "Do you know who these people are, dressed in white robes, and where they have come from?" I answered him, "You can tell me, my lord." Then he said, "These are the people who have been through the great persecution, and they have washed their robes white again in the blood of the Lamb".

Second reading *1 John 3:1-3*

Think of the love that the Father has lavished on us, by letting us be called God's children; and that is what we are. Because the world refused to acknowledge him, therefore it does not acknowledge us. My dear people, we are already the children of God but what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed; all we know is, that when it is revealed we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is. Surely everyone who entertains this hope must purify himself, must try to be as pure as Christ.

Gospel *Matthew 5:1-12*

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up the hill. There he sat down and was joined by his disciples.

Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them: "How happy are the poor in spirit; theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Happy the gentle: they shall have the earth for their heritage. Happy those who mourn: they shall be comforted. Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right: they shall be satisfied. Happy the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them. Happy the pure in heart: they shall see God. Happy the peacemakers: they shall be called children of God. Happy those who are persecuted in the cause of right: theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Happy are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven."

Meditation

Since the fourth century various Eastern Churches have commemorated a feast of all martyrs.

By the sixth century this commemoration was celebrated at Rome. November 1 as the date for this celebration in the West seems to have originated in Ireland and/or Britain where it was seen as a "harvest feast" at the close of the liturgical year. In 844, Pope Gregory IV established this date for all the Roman Church. Joined to the day was the commemoration of the dedication of the Pantheon as the church of St. Mary and All Martyrs. "Who are these people, all dressed in white?

And where have they come from?" (Rv 7:13). The question demands an answer if All Saints is not to be a mere daydream unrelated to the reality of our lives. We are these people celebrating what we ourselves are in process of becoming. The solemnity of All Saints is the feast of the possible saint which each of us bears within. There are several mistaken ideas about the saints who have preceded us. The first error is to imagine them only in their final state, a halo around their heads above some altar. In reality the saints are in our midst, even if "what we shall later be has not yet come to light." (1 Jn 3:2). They belong first of all to the earth, to that pilgrim people coming from the great trial of this life and climbing, in uninterrupted procession, toward the final city.

Often we also run the risk of considering the saints as superhuman, escaping the common lot of mortals by their miracles and their exceptional strength of soul. There again, if we look closely, we see that their faults of character were not always overcome. The saints remained subject to their passions but placed them at the service of their holiness. For holiness itself is passion converted.

Saint Bernard liked to describe the Church between the two comings of the Lord as "ante et retro oculata." That is, we are looking back toward the ideal of the beatitudes, and forward toward that huge crowd of the Book of Revelation whom we must soon join.