

## All Saints

I take as my text the 9<sup>th</sup> verse from the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Book of Revelation:

*After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.*

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable unto thee O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.*

This verse from Revelation written by the Apostle John paints for us an incredible picture of what it must be like for the Saints who have gone before us, who have entered the larger life. Of course, it is part of what we call apocalyptic literature in style, but it enables us to visualize the joy of all the Saints who have passed through the veil. But it also focuses our attention on the Communion of Saints which we celebrate today.

As we celebrate the **Feast of All Saints**, our patronal festival, we are reminded that is not only a celebration of the Saints who have already entered into the larger life but it is also a celebration of all of us who are “members incorporate of the Mystical Body of Christ.”

By that, I mean that all of us who have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and have been baptized into His Body, the Church, are Saints in the larger sense.

In Scripture, “saints” is used for all of the people of God, not just those who have been martyred, but all of those who have been sanctified by the Holy Spirit. That includes us, even though, over the years, the Church has developed a cult of the martyrs making a distinction between those Saints who are more distinguished and the rest of us less noteworthy Christians, at least in the eyes of the Visible Church.

The celebration of All Saints, as a feast of the Church, goes back to at least the third century. By the fourth century, it was observed on May 13<sup>th</sup> as the Festival of All Martyrs.

Over the next several centuries, the Eastern Church settled on the Sunday after Pentecost for the Feast of All Saints. In the eighth century, the English Church, following the dedication of a chapel for All Saints in St. Peter’s in Rome on November 1st, adopted this date for the feast day and has kept it since as has the Western Church in general.

Again, we see in the propers for All Saints that this day is not just a commemoration of all the faithful departed souls; rather, taken together as a whole, the Collect, Epistle, and Gospel give us a complete picture of what this celebration is all about.

The Collect, from the 1549 Prayer Book, expresses the doctrine of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ; the Epistle, taken from the Sarum and Roman Missals, describes the universality of the faithful and their victory, not just the martyrs, but all the faithful in Christ; and the Gospel presents a picture of the faithful, the Saints of the New Covenant, as those who are humble, pure of heart, who are persecuted because of their love of righteousness and for their sorrow over the evil in the world.

If we look at the picture of the Saint that Jesus has drawn for us in the Beatitudes, the very first thing to note is the word “blesséd.” It is part of the key to our understanding the meaning of each Beatitude. From the Greek, *makarios*, it’s meaning as used is “a godlike joy.” Translated from the Hebrew, the expression “blesséd are” might best be compared to an exclamation as “O the blessédness of.”

Thus, we would find in the Beatitudes: first, “O the blessédness of the poor in spirit.” But, it is even more than that: it is the pure joy, the bliss of the poor in spirit, or better the bliss of those who have come to realize how utterly helpless they are and who have put their whole trust in God.

For each Beatitude that is part of Christ’s picture of the saint, there is relevance to us today.

The second beatitude: *Blesséd are they that mourn*, that is, the bliss of those whose hearts grieve for the suffering in the world and for their own sin. From this sorrow, from their contrition they will find the joy of God.

*Blesséd are the meek*: those who keep themselves under control and are angry at the right times for the right reasons and who have the humility to realize their own shortcomings.

*Blesséd are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness*: those who hunger for and thirst for goodness, who are neither half-hearted nor over-bearing, but do hunger and thirst for righteousness as do the starving for food and those perishing of thirst for water.

*Blesséd are the merciful*: not those who are sympathetic, but those who have empathy and respond with caring hearts.

*Blesséd are the pure in heart*: those whose motives are unadulterated, unmixed, with no hidden agendas.

*Blesséd are the peace-makers*: not those who love peace but those who work to establish right relationships one with another, who have put away bitterness and strife and who work to bring people together.

*Blesséd are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake ; Blesséd are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake:* the road of a Christian is not easy. When we dedicate ourselves to our Lord Jesus Christ, we find ourselves often at odds with the world around us, with our friends, sometimes even with our own families. It is with joy that our Lord calls us out of the world to be the adopted sons and daughters of God and in accepting that call and the cost to us in this world, we are brought into a closer relationship with God and all the Saints, those who have gone before and those still in this world.

It should be with joy and love that we are joined together with all the Saints, “The Communion of the Saints,” as we confess in the Apostles Creed.

Though there is difficulty in understanding the Revelation written by St. John, we do see the inclusiveness, the universality of the Communion of the Saints: people from many lands, different languages coming together as one flock to raise the triumphal chorus declaring that salvation belongs to God.

We also see in the days of early Christianity that people were drawn by the very nature of the men, women, and children who were, themselves, Christians; by the love they had for each other, and the power they received from that love which enabled them to love all of mankind, regardless of their condition or state in life, whether they were enemies, friends, or strangers.

People were drawn to Christianity by the joy they could see exhibited in each Christian; joy at knowing who their God and Saviour is; joy at knowing what was in store for them after this life; and the pure joy of sharing with each other their love of God, and their confidence in His love for each of them.

These early Christians were indeed the examples for Christians who followed in their footsteps for they set the standard upon which all the Saints that followed built in the joy and fellowship of Christ.

I often think of one of my favorite hymns so appropriate for this day we celebrate — *I sing a song of the saints of God* — and, no, I not going to try to lead us in singing hymn 243.

But I would like to quote from it, part of the first line:

*I sing a song of the saints of God....  
Patient and brave and true,  
Who toiled and fought and lived and died  
For the Lord they loved and knew,*

And the final verse:

*They lived not only in ages past,  
There are hundreds of thousands still,  
The world is bright with the joyous saints  
Who love to do Jesus' will.  
You can meet them in school, or in lanes, or at sea,  
In church, or in trains, or in shops, or at tea,  
For the saints of God are just folk like me,  
And I mean to be one too.*

This is a marvelous hymn which, while, perhaps, directed more toward children, rings true in all our hearts.

It sets forth for us a goal in life that, begun here on earth, leads us into a holy communion with all the saints and a celebration here and now of the Christian hope of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.