

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year A

Solemnity of All Saints

First reading:

(Revelation 7.2-4, 9-14)

The Martyrs in Safe Keeping

The Book of Revelation, from which this reading is taken, was written during the first persecutions of the Christians. It is built on the promise that, after persecution, those who are faithful to God and to Christ will be delivered and gathered into the peace of God's presence.

At the time of writing, the persecuting force from which they were to be delivered was the might of the Roman Empire, with its immorality, its materialism, its consumerism, and, above all, its demand that all its subjects should worship the emperor as God.

For Christians at that time, the late first century, the great test was whether they would accept the standards of the Empire or remain faithful to the demanding standards of Christianity.

The same decision stands before Christians in today's world. Who is my Lord - Christ or the standards for which the emperor stood, carelessness about sexual morality, materialism, consumerism, putting myself first in everything without regard for the cost to others? Do I connive at and approve standards of behaviour that are built on a morality far from that of Christ? More pressingly, do I accept those standards for myself?

Question:

What are your criteria for sanctity? Is martyrdom too much stressed?

Second reading:

(1 Thessalonians 1.5-10)

We shall be like Him

The second reading also contains hints of an opposition from a godless world, but concentrates much more on union of God's children to God himself.

We are already God's children, because we have been adopted in Christ and can cry 'Abba, Father!' What are the implications of this adoption to sonship?

Sometimes a son is almost absurdly like his father in looks, gestures, mannerisms and ways of approaching any task. For ourselves, we cannot yet fully know what this likeness will consist in, but we are promised that in the fullness of revelation we will be assimilated to God.

Not only must we be close to our Father in prayer, but we must also show the qualities of God in our actions, God's generosity, his forgiveness, his openness. Part of this must be that we will find that God has developed in us all the qualities we most love and admire in others, sons assimilated to their father.

It will be a world of universal joy and appreciation, as all is suffused with the generosity and love of the Father. 'We shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is', and this means that the vision of God will be so overwhelming that we cannot but become like him.

Question:

What are the elements you look forward to in heaven?

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Gospel:

(Matthew 5.1-12)

The Beatitudes

These eight blessings stand at the head of the Sermon on the Mount, pointing out eight ways in which we can welcome God into our lives. They are ways of living out God's blessing, possible only if the hand of God is upon you.

That is why the first and the last knit them all together with 'theirs is the kingdom of heaven'. Jesus came to proclaim the Kingship of his Father, and these are ways of living it.

For each of them, do you know someone in the parish or elsewhere in your life who exemplifies the attitude? Or one of the saints who typifies each of them to you? What is your own favourite?

For most of them there are gospel incidents in which Jesus sums them up, like the entry into Jerusalem on a donkey as the gentle king, or the love he shows in his welcome to sinners, or his bringing peace to those tortured by disease or contempt, or his purity of heart in his single-minded preoccupation with his Father's will, and finally his acceptance of persecution for what he knew to be right. Any Christian may suddenly find herself face to face with this shattering challenge.

Question:

Are the beatitudes an adequate summary of Christian holiness?
