

## ALL SAINTS DAY

November 1, 2020

Revelation 7:2–4, 9–14 • 1 John 3:1–3 • Matthew 5:1–12a

### I.

In a short period of time,  
from Friday afternoon to Saturday morning,  
I witnessed the end and the beginning of Christian life.

On Friday, I administered the last rites to someone.

I then received a call from the person's relative informing me of her death  
as I was preparing to baptize a child.

Baptism is the beginning of Christian life.

In either case,  
I don't think the person had or will have a memory of what happened.

That is OK.

The dying person, although frail, knew what was happening in the moment;  
she made the Sign of the Cross with me and together we recited the Our Father.

In the case of the young child who was baptized,  
his parents and godparents will remember that event.

That's their role:  
to remember what happened,  
to teach the child about the new life given to him,  
and to help him receive that gift from God.

I often reflect on how most of what we do in life will never be remembered,  
either by ourselves or by others.

Even people who accomplished great things fade somewhat.

But God remembers everything.

That dimension of his omnipotence worth pondering.

With that in mind,  
the First Reading presents a striking image of all the saints,  
whom we celebrate today:

“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.”

The saints are presented collectively,  
as a “great multitude.”

The preceding verse mentions,

“Those who had been  
marked with the seal,  
one hundred and forty-four thousand marked  
from every tribe of the children of Israel.”

12 is the square root of 144;  
144,000 alludes to the 12 tribes of Israel.

Perhaps this is a reference to Jewish Christians,  
whereas the “great multitude” from “every nation”  
represents the Gentile portion of the Church.

In either case, there seems to be a huge number of people in heaven,  
which is a hopeful sign.

Both are symbols of immensity,  
and yet God knows all the saints individually.

No memory is lost to him.

Just as parents preserve the memories of their young children,  
and adult children preserve the memories of their parents if they cannot remember,  
so God knows us—perfectly.

God remembers all the good we do,  
and not just our sins

For those baptized as infants,  
that sacrament is the first “memory” of holiness known to God.

Baptism is the framework for a lifetime of holiness,  
because the sacrament draws us into the dying and rising of Christ.

This is what it means, in the First Reading, to say that,

“They have washed their robes  
and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb.”

And the palm branches that the saints carry aloft are symbols of Christ’s victory:  
his death and resurrection that forgives our sins  
and empowers us to live supremely for God.

The event of Christ’s death and resurrection  
is also renewed in each celebration of the Eucharist.

This is what it means to say that the Mass is a sacrifice;  
it makes Christ’s death and resurrection present,  
and it gives us a share in that event of our salvation.

The Eucharist, we could say, is the perfect and perpetual memory of the Cross,  
always making it present to us”

“They cried out in a loud voice:  
‘Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne,  
and from the Lamb.’”

Baptism is the beginning of sainthood;  
the Eucharist is the engine for living out our Baptism.

“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.’”

This heavenly scene is liturgical;  
it depicts the worship of God.

At Mass, we experience the beginning of heaven.

We too are gathered around the throne,  
together with the Virgin Mary and all the saints.

They are cheering us on—  
interceding for us and leaving us a good example—  
as we make our way through life.

They have brought their baptism to fulfillment;  
they too were nourished by the Eucharist.

Time goes on, and memories fade,  
but God endures.

The saints are joined to God, who remembers them.

Their happiness is our destiny too.

God remembers all we do;  
he is with us throughout our lives.

God is our home.