

Catechist: Solemnity of All Saints

Submitted by lectionaryadmin on Sun, 10/25/2015 - 20:00

Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for the session, read all the readings.

Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14

Psalm 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6

1 John 3:1-3

Matthew 5:1-12a

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading which appealed to you? Was there a word or image that engaged you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.

The Word in Liturgy

The remote origins of this feast are found in the honor that early Christians paid to the martyrs, remembering them on the anniversary of their death, often at the very place of their martyrdom. After the age of persecution had ended, other holy individuals were gradually added to the list of those commemorated annually. In the fourth century, saints were named in the Eucharistic Prayer. By the fifth century, a feast of All Saints was celebrated in certain churches of the Christian East. When Pope Boniface (d. 615) transformed the Roman pantheon into a Christian church on May 13, 610, he designated that day as a feast of all saints. It was under Gregory IV (d. 844) that the feast was moved to November 1, and thenceforth the observance spread throughout the West.

Today's reading from the Book of Revelation contains excerpts from two visions, each portraying in vivid imagery the salvation on the just. In the first, an angel comes from the east (the place from which the messiah was expected to come) "holding the seal of the living God." In the ancient world, a sovereign's seal was a sign both of ownership and of protection. Thus, the angel's placing of the seal on the forehead of God's servants affords them protection in the time of trial. The number 144,000 is symbolic of a vast, all-inclusive throng (the perfect number twelve squared, times one thousand). In the second vision, the survivors of the time of trial (i.e., the Roman persecution under Domitian, 81-96) are revealed in glory, an obvious appeal to those still undergoing persecution to persevere. Their white robes are reminiscent of their baptismal garments as well as symbolic of the "washing" they have undergone in the blood of the Lamb, both references are expressive of the saving action of Christ on behalf of his faithful followers.

Scholars have helped us understand the internal struggles of the Johannine community that prompted the writing of this letter. Apparently, a split had developed to the point of some members leaving the community (see 1 John 2:19). The author warns his followers against the errors of those who have left, and reiterates key points of his own teaching. He insists here that the transformation of the believers under the power of Christ's grace is real ("children of God...is what we are"). But that transformation is a progressive, ongoing reality, not something that happened once and for all, freeing a person to disregard all further ethical concerns ("what we shall later be has not yet come to light"). The letter offers a classic description of what it means to be a saint, what true holiness consists in: "...we shall be like him [Christ]."



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Matthew uses a various subtle cues to underline the tremendous importance of Jesus' teaching contained in the Beatitudes. Like Moses, he ascends a mountain to proclaim the law of the (new) covenant. Unlike Moses, he speaks words on his own authority. What he says describes not only who is a member of God's Kingdom; he also prescribes how those who wish to belong in that Kingdom must act. The nature of Christian holiness is summed up in these idealistic yet demanding pronouncements of who is "blessed" in God's Kingdom. The suffering and persecution of the "little ones" are recognized as a source of holiness; so, too, is action aimed at transforming the world to make it conform to the Kingdom which Jesus announced.

Catholic Doctrine

The Communion of Saints

All Christians who follow in the way of Jesus are called to a life of holiness and witness on behalf of the kingdom of God. The Second Vatican Council stated, "It is therefore quite clear that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love, and by this holiness a more human manner of life is fostered also in earthly society." (LG, 40) Using the strength which Christ provides, we who confess his name are given the grace to follow in his footsteps and conform ourselves more closely to the image of Jesus. Thus, we are able to devote ourselves wholeheartedly to the glory of God and serve our neighbor. The holiness which is fostered among the People of God by the grace of Christ will grow in fruitful abundance "as is clearly shown in the history of the church through the life of so many saints." (LG, 40)

One of the creedal affirmations is belief in the 'communion of saints.' What is meant by this phrase? The Catechism asserts quite simply and clearly that the communion of saints is the Church. The church forms one body, with Christ as its head, who shares his riches with all the members through the sacraments. Those riches, governed by one and the same Spirit throughout all the members, are considered as one common fund (CCC 947). The term *communis in sacris*, therefore, indicates both a sharing in holy things (the riches of Christ) and a sharing among a holy people (we who are claimed for God in Christ).

Thus, in the New Testament, "the saints" refers to the whole body of believers, the Church. But, in terms of the formal, ecclesial procedure for the recognition of saints (canonization), the term refers to those men and women who throughout our Christian history who have been outstanding in holiness, sometimes heroic in their efforts to witness to the Kingdom of God.

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