

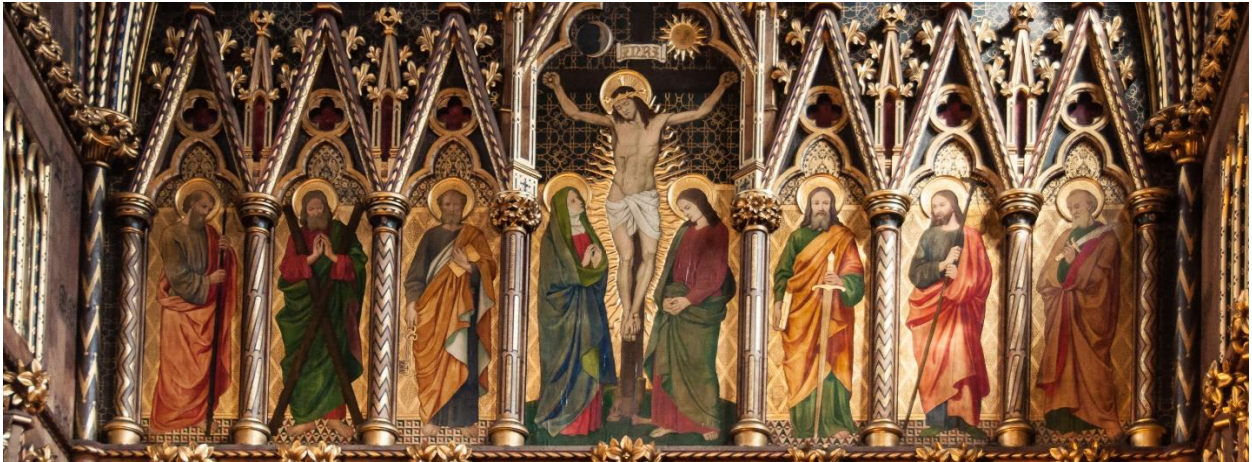
SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

All Saints

Year A

1 November 2020



Collect

Almighty ever-living God,
by whose gift we venerate in one celebration
the merits of all the Saints,
bestow on us, we pray,
through the prayers of so many intercessors,
an abundance of the reconciliation with you
for which we earnestly long.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Readings and Commentaries

The feast of All Saints originated in the East early in the fifth century as a commemoration of all martyrs. It appeared in Rome two centuries later but only became established on this date sometime in the papacy of Gregory III (731-741).

The spirit of the feast is captured in the Preface:

“For today by your gift we celebrate the festival of your city, the heavenly Jerusalem, our mother, where the great array of our brothers and sisters already gives you eternal praise.

“Towards her, we eagerly hasten as pilgrims advancing by faith, rejoicing in the glory bestowed upon those exalted members of the Church through whom you give us, in our frailty, both strength and good example.”

Today's Solemnity goes hand in hand with tomorrow's Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed. On All Saints' Day we celebrate the glory of God's holy ones; on All Souls' Day we intercede with trust and confidence for those who have gone before us but whose fate we do not know.

A reading from the book of the 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 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 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.'

First Reading

The book of the Apocalypse aims to give encouragement to a persecuted Christian minority, threatened by the might of hostile powers. Like other works of this kind it uses visions and symbols to insist that the forces of good will prevail. Of their nature apocalyptic writings are works of imagination and thus open to all kinds of interpretation but their ultimate purpose is clear: to persuade struggling communities to believe in final victory. Today's reading comprises the whole of chapter 7 except for its opening verse and the roll-call of the tribes of Israel (vv 5-8). It combines two visions. The first (vv 2-4) is that of the sealing of the 144,000, a symbolic figure derived from the twelve tribes of Israel. Those who are sealed are assured of divine protection from the coming catastrophe. Sealing has both Old and New Testament associations. It recalls the protective signing in Ezekiel (9:4) and Exodus (12:23), and denotes Christian baptism (2 Cor 1:22, Eph 1:13).

The second vision is of a countless multitude of people from all the nations of the world. Mention of the Lamb, white robes and palms brings to mind the great liturgies of Holy Week in which we renew our baptismal participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. The white-robed throng are identified with the martyrs – "those who have been through the great persecution." Paradoxically their robes have been washed "white again in the blood of the Lamb." Their sins have been forgiven through the saving death of Jesus.

The overall tone of the reading is one of triumph, but there will need to be significant variation in delivery to match the diverse components of the text. It includes descriptive material, commands, dialogue and acclamations. Readers will need to rehearse this reading well to enable congregations to see this vividly imagined scene with their mind's eye.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 23:1-6

R. Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face.

The Lord's is the earth and its fullness,
the world and all its peoples.
It is he who set it on the seas;
on the waters he made it firm. **R.**

Who shall climb the mountain of the Lord?
Who shall stand in his holy place?
The man with clean hands and pure heart,
who desires not worthless things. **R.**

He shall receive blessings from the Lord?
and reward from the God who saves him.
Such are the men who seek him,
seek the face of the God of Jacob. **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 23/24 belongs to a liturgical service for entry into the Temple. It's the first half of the prayer that serves as the responsorial psalm today.

The first verse acknowledges the sovereignty of God over the whole of creation. Once this is established, the psalm goes on to raise and answer the question as to who is qualified to enter into God's sanctuary. Only people of integrity who seek God's face will gain admittance. These are the ones who will be rewarded with divine blessing.

The response is adapted from the conclusion of the psalm. It dares us to declare that we are people who seek God and thus qualify for admission into the holy place. The words of the psalm are straightforward enough. Those who prefer inclusive language may check out the NRSV to see how it achieves this goal, primarily by using the plural.

A reading from the first letter of St 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.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to 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 sons 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.'

Second Reading

We heard most of this reading from 1 John on the 4th Sunday of Easter. Today's excerpt adds the very short admonition that forms verse 3. The text may have a familiar ring. It is used often enough at funeral services because of its reference to the time "when we shall see (God) as he really is." This mention of future vision links the reading to the heavenly scenes just described in the Apocalypse. Nonetheless, the dominant emphasis is not on future promise but on present reality, for "we are already the children of God" and "must try to be as pure as Christ."

Like the letter as a whole this passage has a meditative quality about it; it invites us to dwell within the mystery, the wonderful mystery of the love that God has lavished on us. But even as the author sheds light on this glorious truth, he also draws attention to the dark shadow of the world's refusal to acknowledge God and the Christian community.

Both the brevity of the reading and its contemplative spirit invite the reader to deliver the text slowly and prayerfully. This will give the congregation the opportunity to see and know the truth for themselves.

Gospel

Given the extreme familiarity of this text, it may surprise some to learn that Sunday Mass-goers hear the gospel of the beatitudes no more than once every three years, and that's early in Year A. They only hear it a second time in the cycle when the festival of All Saints falls on a Sunday. Of course a number of the congregation are likely to have heard it read or sung at other celebrations they have attended, especially funerals.

Presiders are sure to have read this passage out many times over. Their challenge is to proclaim it freshly, as if no-one had ever heard it before. A simple exercise may help. Checking out two or three other translations or looking up a new commentary could spark a new insight. This in turn might invigorate the presider's delivery of the text as well as inspire his homily.

There is no doubt about the importance of the passage as far as Matthew is concerned. It is the overture to the first of the five discourses that he gives to Jesus in memory of the five books of the Torah. The beatitudes are steeped in the tradition that Jesus absorbed from his family and townsfolk as he grew up. At the same time they open out on to a new future. Past wisdom and future promise combine in these paradoxical sayings whose meaning we can never exhaust. They carry an implicit warning: wrestling with them may leave us wounded like Jacob (Gen 32:22-32).

Concluding Prayers

Almighty and all-merciful God,
lover of the human race, healer of all our wounds,
in whom there is no shadow of death,
save us in this time of crisis;
grant wisdom and courage to our leaders;
watch over all medical people
as they tend the sick and work for a cure;
stir in us a sense of solidarity beyond all isolation;
if our doors are closed, let our hearts be open.
By the power of your love destroy the virus of fear,
that hope may never die
and the light of Easter, the triumph of life,
may shine upon us and the whole world.
Through Jesus Christ, the Lord risen from the dead,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.

Holy Mary, health of the sick, pray for us.
St Joseph, guardian of us all, pray for us.

(Most Rev. Mark Coleridge, Archbishop of Brisbane)

or

Gracious God,
We give thanks anew for your providence and presence.
We prayerfully seek your grace, amidst COVID-19 here and overseas.
We pray for those in need of healing.
We pray for your peace with those who are anxious or grieving.
We pray you will continue to strengthen and sustain
all those who are serving in response.
We pray for your Holy Spirit's discernment
amidst the many choices and decisions
facing our national, community and medical leaders.
We pray we each might see quickly what more we can do
to help those who are vulnerable.
This prayer for our nation in the family of nations,
with all that is on our hearts,
we gather now and pray
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

(Ecumenical prayer from the National Council of Churches. We have been invited to pray this prayer at 7pm each day.)