



## All Saints' Day

[Revelation 7:9-17](#); [Psalm 34:1-10, 22](#); [1 John 3:1-3](#); [Matthew 5:1-12](#)

### Sermon - The saints beside you

“Glory to God and praise and love / be now and ever given / by saints below and saints above, / the Church in earth and heaven.”

So concludes Charles Wesley’s venerable hymn, “O for a thousand tongues to sing.” The hallowed vision of saints robed in white, genuflecting and joining together in a chorus of praise around a resplendent heavenly throne is as powerful as it is alluring.

Although many, if not most Christians shy away from reading and studying Revelation, the apocalyptic vision of the enigmatic John of Patmos helps develop our vision of what that “glorious company of the Saints in light” might look like. We’re told that angels are gathered around the throne with four living creatures, falling on their faces worshipping God day and night, singing a song of praise. We’re told that they hunger and thirst no more, and that sun and heat will not strike them because the Lamb is their shepherd, guiding them to the springs of the water of life, as God wipes away every tear from their eyes.

And yet, as idyllic and unspoiled as this image is, it’s incomplete.

John’s description doesn’t stop there. He goes on to write that the “great multitude” gathered around the throne are those “who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Although literal readings of Revelation that condone violence are theologically problematic at best and downright dangerous at worst, we cannot deny that those who enjoy the place of honor in John’s apocalyptic vision have undergone suffering, and given the tone of apocalyptic literature in general and Revelation in particular, we can surmise that some have even endured physical violence.

What might this mean for a church that commits itself to striving for justice, freedom and peace? Or perhaps a more pressing question as we celebrate All Saints' Day is, what might it mean for John's "great multitude," complete with their blood-stained robes, to be identified in the storied history of the church as saints?

The quick, albeit half-hearted answer is to do as countless others have done, and re-shelve Revelation as an indecipherable apocalyptic dream sequence written by an unknown disciple of the fledgling first-century Jesus movement.

But as wars rage on with ever-increasing frequency, as diseases and disasters continue to strike with indiscriminate and unrelenting cruelty, and as the unreliability of the global economy continues to provoke fear and anxiety, we may know more than we think about these "great ordeals" and blood-stained robes that John identifies so provocatively. And on this day in particular, perhaps the Spirit is calling the church to reconsider John's apocalyptic witness – complete with all its harshness and unanswered questions.

In the midst of the violent imagery and occluded visions lays this powerful word of hope: After all is said and done, after the plagues of war and famine and disaster have done their worst, salvation belongs, not to the generals and the dictators and the power mongers of this world, but to God alone!

This is the great and enduring truth of the gospel, and it comes alive on this All Saints' Day, reminding the faithful that the powers and principalities of this world will not have the last word. In fact, not only is this Good News, we hear from the lips of Jesus himself that it is a blessing.

In a dramatic reversal of the customs of this world, Jesus foretells the truth of the Kingdom of God:

Unsure of your direction in life? You're blessed.

Caught under the weight of grief and loss? Joy comes in the morning.

Undervalued and not heard by those around you? God hears you.

Groaning with hunger pangs and longing for a moment of respite? The comforter has come.

Sojourning for peace and righteousness, only to be trampled down by war and revilement, and those spreading lies to discredit you? God is traveling right alongside you.

The saints, Jesus reminds us, aren't simply those who seem to have it all figured out, whose prayer life is perfect, whose service to church and community alike are irreproachable, and who have left a legacy that the rest of us will spend a lifetime aspiring to realize for ourselves.

On the contrary: The saints, Jesus tells us and John reminds us, are those who have suffered greatly – and some who suffer still, even in our midst – and yet praise God all the more. The saints are those who have known the pain of grief and the sting of death, and still manage to find a way to sing, “Alleluia!” The saints are those who have been excluded and ignored by every corner of society and yet still find ways to seek and serve Christ, loving their neighbor as themselves.

And so when we celebrate all saints, we commemorate those worshipping in our pews who are suffering silently. We work to include those in our community who love God and neighbor, and yet find themselves on the margins. And we remember those whose worship of God is unceasing, even now that they have passed into light perpetual.

Our worship on this day, then, bears both the potential for difficult news that is hard to hear as well as the great and powerful news of a gospel that continually confounds even our best efforts to contain it. For if we approach this day, looking to the saints as nothing more than long-gone exemplars of moral and theological perfection, the witness of Jesus in the Matthew's gospel and of John's Revelation falls flat and bears little possibility for transformation.

But if we allow the Spirit to move in our midst, then we might be surprised by what we see when we look across the aisle of the church or down the street or into the parts of town that have a checkered reputation. We might be surprised to find saints there who, even in the most unimaginable circumstances, find ways to lift up their hearts in prayer and praise to God.

And when we hear those soft, but faithful notes of “Alleluia!” emanating from deep within the souls of the saints among us, we will know that salvation does indeed belong to our God, who is seated upon the throne, now and for evermore.

— *The Rev. Marshall A. Jolly is priest-in-charge of [Grace Episcopal Church](#) in Florence, Ky. He earned a B.A. in American Studies from Transylvania University and a Master's of Divinity and certificate in Anglican Studies from Emory University's Candler School of Theology.*

*More....*

## ONLINE SERMONS

[Glimpsing Heaven in Thin Places,](http://day1.org/1117-glimpsing_heaven_in_thin_places) the Rev. Nora Tubbs Tisdale, *Day 1*  
[http://day1.org/1117-glimpsing\\_heaven\\_in\\_thin\\_places](http://day1.org/1117-glimpsing_heaven_in_thin_places)

["Attitudes and Be-Attitudes,"](http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/all_saints_attitudes.htm)  
[http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/all\\_saints\\_attitudes.htm](http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/all_saints_attitudes.htm)

["What Is a Saint?"](http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/all_saints_what_is_a_saint.htm) Pastor Edward F. Markquart  
[http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/all\\_saints\\_what\\_is\\_a\\_saint.htm](http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/all_saints_what_is_a_saint.htm)

Matthew 5: 1-12 - A word to the adventurous  
Scroll down...  
<http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocA/61SAINTS.htm>

## PRAYER OF REMEMBRANCE

Living God, in whom there is no shadow or change, we thank you for the gift of life eternal, and for all those who having served you well, now rest from their labours.

We thank you for all the saints remembered and forgotten, for those dear souls most precious to us. Today we give thanks for those who during the last twelve months have died and entered into glory.

We bless you for their life and love, and rejoice for them "all is well, and all manner of things will be well."

God of Jesus and our God, mindful of all those choice souls who have gone on ahead of us,

teach us, and each twenty-first century disciple of every race and place,

to follow their example to the best of our ability:

to feed the poor in body or spirit,

to support and comfort the mourners and the repentant,

to encourage the meek and stand with them in crises,

to affirm those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

to cherish and learn from the merciful,

to be humbled by, and stand with, the peacemakers.

Let us clearly recognise what it means  
to be called the children of God,  
and to know we are to be your saints  
neither by our own inclination nor  
in our own strength  
but simply by the call  
and the healing holiness  
of Christ Jesus our Saviour.

***Amen!***

***SEE ALSO - Resource Pack for All Saints in Parish Support Pack area -  
scroll down to the last item***