

Solemnity of All Saints Day - We are all saints

November 1, 2020.

2020 is a special year: COVID-19 pandemic, full moon on Halloween night, All Saints Day on Sunday, Just to mention a few. Some Christians are wondering is the end of the world approaching as St John wrote in the Revelation. Though Jesus came and fulfilled the expectations of his people, nevertheless we are still waiting for His second coming. The liturgy states clearly: ***“As we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.”*** And in Eucharistic Prayer IV, we find, ***“As we await his coming in glory . . .”*** The Creed says, ***“He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.”***

It is about 90 A.D. The Roman Empire is under the Emperor Domitian, who has declared himself to be God, and ruler over heaven and Earth. The Christians are cruelly persecuted because they do not accept him. The small village in Asia Minor, to which the aged apostle John has withdrawn, is also attacked by Roman soldiers. As if by a miracle, John is the only person to escape the slaughter, and he receives divine orders to write down the visions he will have, and communicate them to the Christian communities. The voice tells him that they should discover what is and what will happen thereafter - **Revelation**.

The **Book of Revelation** (also called the **Apocalypse of John**) is the final book of the New Testament, the final book of the Christian Bible. It is the only apocalyptic book in the New Testament canon. Thus, it occupies a central place in Christian eschatology. Many, if not most Christians, shy away from reading and studying Revelation, but the apocalyptic vision of the enigmatic St 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.**

We watched a 2000 movie **Apocalypse** by Richard Harris. It tells the whole version of St John. It is worth watching: <https://tubitv.com/video/479293>. Also there is an one actor stage play **St. John in Exile** (<https://tubitv.com/video/477994>) which skillfully describes how St John has been punished in exile to the island of Patmos. He is all alone and has time to reflect and tell us about his life, faith and troubles. 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 reading (Matthew 5:1-12A). In a dramatic reversal of the customs of this world, Jesus foretells the truth of the Kingdom of God: ***“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. ... Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. ... Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven”.***

What the saints, Jesus and John remind us are those who have suffered greatly – and some who suffer still, even in our midst – and yet praise God all the more. We don't have to be super smart, super perfect, beautiful to be a saint. **St Philomena** took a vow of consecrated virginity at age 13. When the Emperor Diocletian "fell in love" with the young Philomena and, when she refused to be his wife, the Emperor subjected her to a series of torments: scourging; drowning with an anchor attached to her; being shot with arrows; and finally had her decapitated. **St Christina the Astonishing** was developmentally impaired, and yet she became a spiritual adviser to rulers and peasants alike. **St Joseph Cupertino** needed a literal miracle to pass his theology exams. **St Rita of Cascia**, a widow who entered the convent, was given a mystical vision of Christ's passion. She experienced on her own forehead one of the

wounds caused by Christ's crown of thorns. She bore the open wound on her face for the last decades of her life, and it was ugly and smelly. **St Rose of Lima**, sacrificed her beauty by cutting her hair and burned her face to stop suitors. **St Pio of Pietralcina** was grumpy and temperamental. He used to be harsh and demanding even when he was hearing confessions. And yet, sinners from all over the world were drawn to his confessional.

The characteristic shared by all the saints is the truly amazing ability to experience deep joy even in the midst of terrible pain and sorrow. This is what Jesus means when he says that those who are poor, in mourning, and persecuted are blessed. Holiness is a mature friendship with Jesus Christ, a friendship so deep and strong that it allows us to experience the joy of eternal life even while still fighting the painful battles of our earthly exile. 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 neighbour as themselves.

And so, on this All Saints Day, when we remember those who have gone before us, we are reminded of how short our time on earth is. We are reminded of the precious nature of that time, and the fact that it is irreversible. We only live it once. As St Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:2-3 ***"To those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"***. We are not merely called to be saints, but by the Blood of Jesus and the grace of God we are saints. We are all part of the visions in the Revelation. **We are all saints!**

November is also the month entirely devoted to the deceased. That's why it is also called "Month of the All Souls". The Church commemorates all her faithful children who have departed from this life. St. Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 warns us that we must not be ignorant concerning the dead, nor sorrowful, **"even as others who have no hope ... For the Lord Himself shall come down from heaven ... and the dead who are in Christ shall rise.** So for the month, let's pray daily for the dead and the dying, especially during the pandemic: ***"O most merciful Jesus, Lover of souls, we pray You, by the agony of Your most Sacred Heart, and by the sorrows of Your Immaculate Mother, cleanse in Your Own Blood the sinners of the whole world who are now in their agony and who are to die this day. Amen"***.