

## THE SOLEMNITY OF ALL SAINTS 1st November

The gospel reading for this great feast is from the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel, the Eight Beatitudes. Each beatitude reflects the happiness and joy of life in the Kingdom of God if one leads a life which is truly poor in spirit, gentle, merciful, pure in heart, being concerned for what is right, being prepared to suffer for the Name. The first reading from the Apocalypse speaks of the 'huge number, impossible to count....standing in front of the throne....' An image of the saints in the Kingdom. In the second reading we hear of the love God has been lavished upon us.

The **Second Reading** is from the Book of the Apocalypse (Greek) or Revelation (English). It is a revelation of hidden things, particularly of hidden events in the future. The authors of apocalyptic writings may be considered the successors of the prophets; they heard the Word of God and passed it on by word of mouth, whereas apocalyptic writers were given revelation in a dream and passed it on in writing. The language of this writing is richly symbolic and the importance of the visions which are described is never in their immediate literal meaning. The imagery must be appreciated at its true value and we must do our best to translate the symbols back into the ideas which the author intended them to convey. This type of writing became very popular in the two centuries before Christ, the visions of Ezekiel and Zechariah paving the way, and was fully developed by 165 BC when the book of Daniel was written. The authorship was attributed to John, the apostle, by writers in the West, while those in the East did not hold this view. The book is dated about 95 AD with parts written at the end of the sixties AD. The book is first and foremost a tract for the times, a period of disturbance and bitter persecution, to increase the hope and determination of the infant Church. This hope is based on the belief in the great 'Day of Yahweh' spoken of by the prophet Amos 5.18. The 'Day' is coming soon when God will liberate his people from their oppressors. When John wrote the Church had been decimated by persecution, Rome and its empire (The Beast) was only a tool wielded by Satan. The book portrays the basic realities on which faith relies in any period of history; God's promise to be with his people. It is this presence that has now been perfected by the marriage of God and his new chosen people in the person of his Son, Immanuel (God-with-us). The promise of the risen Christ, 'I am with you always; yes, to the end of time,' is what gives life to the Church.

The reading, 7.2-4,9-14, is one of the prophetic visions, this one, teaching that God's servants will be preserved. The four angels 'whose duty it was to devastate land and sea,' are commanded to wait until God's servants are clearly marked out, the number represents the totality of all who have been faithful to Christ. After this the martyrs, those who have given witness by dying for Christ, are mentioned along with the angels who together praise God. Then, John is asked if he knows who these people are. He is told they are those who have suffered persecution and 'have washed their robes white again in the blood of the Lamb,' blood being the symbol of the effectiveness of Christ's death. A picture of final victory.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 23.1-6, was said as the sanctuary was solemnly entered. The Lord owns the whole of the earth which it seems is resting on the waters of the nether ocean. (See Gen.1.6-7.) Reflecting on those mentioned in the first reading we are told who shall stand in God's holy place and receive his blessing. Such are those who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

The **Second Reading** is from the first letter of St John. There are three letters attributed to John the first being the most important, possibly written at the same time as the gospel. This letter was written to the Christian communities of Asia (Turkey) because they were suffering near disintegration due to some early heresies which were afflicting the Church. In the introduction the writer says he wants to share what he has 'seen and heard', his experiences, with his readers. He picks out three main points 1. To live in the light of Christ and he lists four conditions to live such a life. 2. To live as God's children with three conditions necessary, and 3. He speaks of the source of love and faith. Love is from God so we must love, and faith in Christ Jesus is necessary to overcome the world. The letter ends with two supplementary points.

The reading, 3.1-3, is from the section where John is teaching how to live as God's children. We are God's children because of the love he has lavished on us. The world cannot recognize us for what we are, God's children, because the world doesn't acknowledge God. We are God's children now but what we shall become after death 'has not yet been revealed,' but we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is. If we treasure this hope we must purify ourselves and try to be as pure as Jesus.