

- In our first reading from the book of Revelation, St. John the apostle describes those who attain salvation —the “elect”—as the new Israel...the successors of the twelve tribes...the faithful marked with the seal of God because they have born the inevitable sufferings and difficulties encountered in following Christ and remained faithful.
 - John sees their multitude in Heaven wearing white robes as a sign of their victory...surrounding the throne of God and the Lamb...who is, of course, Jesus...the Lamb of God.
 - There is often excessive focus on the number stated: 144,000, which is not a literal, but a symbolic, number.
 - It is just 12 (for the 12 tribes) times 12 (for the apostles) times 1000...simply indicating a great number.
 - St. Peter is not at the pearly gates with a clicker counting off : “143, 998...143,999...144,000! That’s it; close the gates!!
 - And this is evident by John’s words: *“I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches (of praise and victory) in their hands...”*
 - Who are those multitudes? John continues: *“[The angel] said to me, ‘These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’”*
 - ALL who seek to be faithful to Christ share in that cleansing blood of Christ on the cross—in that blood which redeems us from sin...and in the resurrection which justifies and gives us the ultimate hope.
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- But the goal of salvation is not reached passively or simply by our mere existence; it is one for which we must continuously strive.
 - This is why we celebrate this All Saints Day each year. This is why we decorate our homes and churches...our highways and byways...our cars and cubicles...with images of the saints—to keep before us their examples of fidelity and courage...and even of their toughness...in times of trial and challenge to their faith.

- All the apostles save St. John were martyred for their witness to Christ.
- We have the early Roman martyrs...the great saints of the Middle Ages like Benedict and Bernard, Francis and Teresa through whom the faith spread throughout Europe and beyond...the missionary martyrs to America...native peoples like Kateri Tekakwitha... modern saints like Faustina, Maximillian Kolbe...John Paul II.
- One of my favorites is St. Lawrence—who, laid upon a giant grill to be cooked to death, at one point is reputed to have said: *“Turn me over; I’m done on this side.”*
- And whether you think that most likely a pious legend or not, there is NO legend about Isaac Jogues, whose fingers were bitten off, or Maria Goretti who forgave her murderer...the Korean martyrs, the African martyrs, the Mexican martyrs...and the Syrian martyrs of today...who willingly go to their deaths rather than to deny their faith in Christ.
- All of these, and so many more, we keep before us today as examples of fidelity...as examples of final victory.

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- And, no, our non-Catholic friends and Christian brethren...we do NOT worship the saints...but we DO revere and honor them as our brothers and sisters in Christ...those who have won the truest of victories...who, as St. Paul says, fought the good fight of faith and successfully finished the race... and are honored by God to spend eternity with Him.
 - The saints have NO power of their own...but through their prayers, they elicit the power of God!
 - They are not only our brothers and sisters, but also our models and inspirations...showing us that regular ol’ men and women like you and me have the potential, and are granted the necessary grace, to attain holiness as they did. Each one of us!
 - For, as St. Paul also writes, *God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”* (1Tim 2:4 RSV)...and if God wants that, He would not leave us without the means to achieve it.

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- The saints even now stand before the throne of God to pray for us and intercede for us as we read in Revelation: “...*the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb... with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints...*” (Rev 5:8 RSV)...meaning all the members of the Body of Christ.
- Remember Jesus’ parable of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus (Luke 16)? The rich man suffering in the afterlife was still concerned for his living brothers...and asks Abraham that they might gain wisdom to be faithful to God...showing how even those who have gone before us intercede for us.
- There is only ONE communion of saints...ONE Body of Christ—of which the saints in Heaven, the souls in Purgatory, and the faithful one earth belong.
- St. Paul writes: “*God has so composed the body...that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together...*” (1Cor 12:24-27 RSV)
- And so...if charity is the hallmark of a Christian, how could those who have achieved the victory of charity NOT now pray for we who continue to struggle against evils which lead us away from God?

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- Now our readings today are meant to motivate and strengthen us in striving toward the goal of Heaven.
 - But our Gospel—this great beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew that we call the Beatitudes—also directs us HOW to do it.
 - If you read no other thing of the Bible, read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew—chapters 5-7—this “Gospel in miniature”—in which the primary elements of Jesus’ teaching are presented so clearly and plainly.
 - And what do the Beatitudes exhort us toward?
 - Humility, peace, forgiveness, charity and mercy...a detachment from the world and material goods...and, most of all, steadfastness and

determination in the face of the persecution and trial—which we will inevitably face—for being disciples of Christ rather than the selfishness of the world. Disciples of true and eternal goodness.

- Can we do this? Yes, absolutely! We see this courage and determination even today in the modern martyrs...through the selfless works of missionaries throughout the world...and even through the kindness of that neighbor who forgets himself to lend you a helping hand.
- Behold their courage and fidelity, and be strengthened by it when you feel the tiny stings and pinpricks that come our way in our own very safe society...knowing that God's grace abounds all the more when we are challenged.

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- Remember the story of the little boy who attended a church that had beautiful stained-glass windows.
 - He was told the windows contained pictures of saints.
 - One day he was asked, "*What is a saint?*"...and he piped up eagerly, "*A saint is a person whom God's light shines through!*"
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 - So...as we read in the letter to the Hebrews: "*...since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us...*" (Heb 12:1 RSV)
 - And as Pope (Saint) Clement I said: "*Follow the saints, because those who follow them will become saints.*"...because they themselves followed Christ.

Reading 1

[Rv 7:2-4, 9-14](#)

I, John, saw another angel come up from the East,
holding the seal of the living God.
He cried out in a loud voice to the four angels
who were given power to damage the land and the sea,
“Do not damage the land or the sea or the trees
until we put the seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.”
I heard the number of those who had been marked with the seal,
one hundred and forty-four thousand marked
from every tribe of the children of Israel.

After this I had a vision of a great multitude,
which no one could count,
from every nation, race, people, and tongue.
They stood before the throne and before the Lamb,
wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands.
They cried out in a loud voice:

“Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne,
and from the Lamb.”

All the angels stood around the throne
and around the elders and the four living creatures.
They prostrated themselves before the throne,
worshiped God, and exclaimed:

“Amen. Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving,
honor, power, and might
be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”

Then one of the elders spoke up and said to me,
“Who are these wearing white robes, and where did they come from?”
I said to him, “My lord, you are the one who knows.”
He said to me,
“These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress;
they have washed their robes
and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb.”

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 24:1bc-2, 3-4ab, 5-6](#)

R. (see 6) **Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face.**

The LORD's are the earth and its fullness;
the world and those who dwell in it.

For he founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the rivers.

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

Who can ascend the mountain of the LORD?
or who may stand in his holy place?

One whose hands are sinless, whose heart is clean,
who desires not what is vain.

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

He shall receive a blessing from the LORD,
a reward from God his savior.

Such is the race that seeks him,
that seeks the face of the God of Jacob.

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

Reading II

[1 Jn 3:1-3](#)

Beloved:

See what love the Father has bestowed on us
that we may be called the children of God.

Yet so we are.

The reason the world does not know us
is that it did not know him.

Beloved, we are God's children now;
what we shall be has not yet been revealed.

We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him,
for we shall see him as he is.

Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure,
as he is pure.

Gospel

[Mt 5:1-12a](#)

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain,
and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him.
He began to teach them, saying:

“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 meek,
for they will inherit the land.
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the clean of heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you
and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me.
Rejoice and be glad,
for your reward will be great in heaven.”