



ALL SAINTS DAY (B)
1 November AD 2009

Text: Revelation 7:9-17 & 1 John 3:1-3

Today's theme is, "*With angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify your glorious name . . .*." Those words constitute the responsory for our prayers later. It's a theme you know very well, you speak those words Sunday after Sunday. It is a *catholic* theme, it belongs to the whole Church (the Church universal). I might point out that during the protestant reformation several notable people attempted to revise the worship service —the Mass. But that often proved disastrous. Luther, for the most part left well enough alone. Now of course various revisions to the liturgy have been tried, not only in our own circles but since the Second Vatican Council, also Catholic. To this day the sentences remain, an invitation to you to join your voice at the throne of God.

The lofty phrases of the Preface to the Holy Communion are important because they lead us to the words of Jesus (called *the verba*), words which are used to consecrate the bread and wine of our Eucharist, the Lord's Supper. I have to tell you, in my mind they are unalterable; they are virtually as old as the church herself and only slightly younger than the New Testament. Liturgical scholar, Luther Reed, notes that they were used throughout the third century, known and prayed by Sts. Hippolytus, Cyprian and Augustine. And that they were in such widespread use already in the third century suggests that they had their origin in the generation that followed the apostles. They command a certain authority.

With . . .

"With angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.

The words remind us that our praises join those of the saints in glory. The praise of the Church at the throne of the God and the Lamb is always one, we are united across time and space by the Holy Spirit. "*With angels and archangels*" also suggests to me that when we entered this hall and began our worship we drew a line in the sand by invoking God's name, "the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." In doing so we choose God and leave the world behind, outside: and like Jacob's dream at Bethel, for just a little while we stand in awe at the foot of the of steps that lead to the throne of God and the Lamb; and with Jacob we realize that the ground on which we stand is nothing less than "*the House of God and the Gate of Heaven.*" (Genesis 28:17)

Do you remember *THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE?* C. S. Lewis helped

us by means of a wardrobe to become a child in faith. For a little while we entered the land of Narnia. The wardrobe helped us transition back and forth between two worlds; it was the door. The Bible calls Jesus *the Door*, he is *the Way* into heaven. When we call on his name we come before God in heaven.

Heaven

In worship, *with the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven* we are in the presence of God and the Lamb. Having passed through the Door, we become white robed throning waving victory palm branches—not our victory, but the victory of the Lamb. In the presence of God we are in a different world. Fear has been replaced by joy; and doubt by certainty. We can speak of unearned forgiveness (grace) and the gifts of God. The resurrection and eternal life are the realities. Here in the presence of God bread and wine are the gifts by which the Almighty gives us his Son. In his presence we can sing the mercies of God without fear of reprimand. Here God’s Word is honored, respected, and received with thanks.

Like the Transfiguration of our Lord, the glory of our worship reaches a crescendo and dies away. “We must go in peace to serve the Lord,” return to a world that is black and white. Our doors open to a world that is both mundane and profane. The world in which we must live does not know God, does not see God, does not want much to do with God at all. It’s a show me, prove-it-to-me, world that takes nothing on the basis of faith. It’s a world that doesn’t have much room for trust, and just can’t get into singing the praises of God.

Heaven, now and not yet

But, for a short while each week, by faith we peek into heaven, we enter into in the presence of the Almighty; has written that in these moments heaven has come to earth. There the example is found in the days of Moses and his Tent of Meeting. So it is that God teaches us of a reality that is now already and will be ours in the future—permanently. With joy and certainty we sing of the feast to come.

This “now and not yet” thinking sounds a little awkward. But that’s what John the Apostle is writing about. “*We are God’s children now,*” he says; you don’t have to wait for heaven. You are already one of his elect, one of his saints by grace and through faith. Sure, you still struggle with sin—you know that black and white reality all too well. Yet the righteousness that makes you a saint and a child of God even now—well we read about that just last Sunday.

On the one hand St. Paul at Romans 3:10 says, "*No one is righteous, no, not one.*" And a paragraph later, at v. 21 he writes about that righteousness which we possess as a gift from God:

*"But **now** the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [but we] are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," (Romans 3:21-24)*

So, we are God's children now. We are righteous by virtue of faith in Jesus Christ. By him we have access into heaven. We don't quite know everything, there still are some mysteries. "*What **we will be** has not yet appeared.*" St. John assures us that when Christ appears "*we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.*"

Are your white robes clean and pressed? When you pass through these doors you enter into a different world. When you enter through *the Door*, come prepared for the Feast/ the marriage supper of the Lamb. Death, sorrow, trouble, tears—these belong to the past, to the former days, the days of great tribulation. Now is the time for song, with the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.
Amen

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