

ALL SAINTS

LECTIONARY #667

READING I Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14

A reading from the Book of Revelation

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: >>

From word one, let your tone signal that you are describing an extraordinary vision. These are cataclysmic events you are describing. In the midst of the terror, the voice of an angel calls for a halt, so God's people can be "marked" for protection.

The number is less important than your solemn tone. Those sealed are protected by the one whose mark they bear.

"After this . . ." signals the start of a new, more expansive vision. "Every nation, race . . ." means every sector of humanity is represented. The white robes and palm branches signify the victory of God's elect.

Lift your voice to give this acclamation a joyful chant-like quality.

All of heaven joins the exuberant hymn of praise.

READING I The Book of Revelation opens with John stating that the revelation has been given to him "to show his servants what must happen soon." John uses symbolic language and visions for this task. Today's reading consists of two visions, the first taking place on earth and the second in heaven, each looking ahead to what must happen soon.

In the first vision, we see a single angel coming from the east, symbolic of salvation. The saving angel prevents four destroying angels from damaging the land and sea, thereby announcing a reprieve

from the final judgment until God's servants have received the seal on their foreheads. Used to signify ownership and protection, the seal has long been used to refer to Baptism. Those sealed by the angel, God's baptized servants, belong to God and are protected from the coming cataclysm. They number one hundred forty-four thousand, from every tribe of Israel. This number represents fulfillment and abundance, rather than a literal number.

The second vision looks and sounds like a great heavenly liturgy. The vast multitude wearing white robes symbolic of

Resurrection, joy, and purity, hold palm branches in their hands. Only at the end of the vision do we learn that they have survived the great distress; like the threatened destruction of land and sea in the first vision, the great distress refers to God's final judgment. They cry out in a poetic acclamation well suited to a liturgy celebrating God's victory and our salvation. Everyone in heaven, including the great multitude, all the angels, the elders, and four symbolic living creatures join in an acclamation of profound faith.

Give us a sense that the cry of praise filled the heavens.

The "elder" knows the answer to his own question. His tone is gentle and wise.

The elder speaks with pride and admiration of those who survived persecution and trial.

That these multitudes entered the heavenly sanctuary, not through their own merit, but because of the work of the Lamb, should fill us with expectant hope.

For meditation and context:

The passage is full of wonder at the love of God who makes us his beloved children. Focus on that love before you begin.

Beloved = bee-LUHV-uhd

Look at the assembly as you make this solemn affirmation.

Regret tinges this admission that the world rejected Christ.

Pause briefly after "beloved" before continuing.

READING II

In the desert, God formed a people, making them children of the Lord their God. It was out of love that God acted as a divine parent to them and made them God's own treasured people (Deuteronomy 14:1-2). In their long desert journey and throughout their history, the people of Israel experienced God's love in every circumstance, even when they rejected God's loving kindness. The same love that God bestowed on the ancestors has now been bestowed on the audience to whom John writes. They have

"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 Psalm 24:1bc-2, 3-4ab, 5-6 (6)

R. 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.

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.

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.

READING II 1 John 3:1-3

A reading from the first Letter of Saint John

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**.

also seen, have also experienced, how God has loved them.

Having become God's beloved children, John's community exists in the midst of a world that does not know them. In the theology of John, knowing entails much more than an intellectual comprehension. Genuine knowing implies a right and loving relationship, such as that between the Father and the Son, and between the Lord and the children of God. Because the world does not know either the children or their Father, they can expect hostility and persecution. Yet by identifying the community as

beloved children of God, John is assuring them of God's abiding presence with them, even as God remained with their ancestors.

John includes all of us in his instruction. Even though we are already God's children, the fullness of our identity has not yet been revealed. When the time of fulfillment comes, we children of God will be like our Lord, and we shall see him as he is. In the meantime, we are to strive to live in the very purity that God radiates, perfect integrity, goodness, and holiness.

While some things are *unknown*, John confidently asserts that "At least we know *this* much."

This hope we have requires action on our part—to purify ourselves of all that pollutes the mind and heart.

There are many effective ways to proclaim this familiar Gospel text. You can pause after each "blessed"; or prior to each "for they . . ."; or you might forgo pauses and deliver each Beatitude like a dart flying toward the bull's-eye. What is critical is that you keep a clear image of what (or better, whom) each Beatitude names. Have someone in mind for each of the eight "blesseds" and let their unique goodness color the way you proclaim.

These statements are meant to comfort those who live the Beatitudes and those who think they can't.

The message of these provocative statements is counter-cultural. How would your delivery be affected if some in your assembly got up and left in the middle of your speaking?

Leave time for silence between the Beatitudes so each can sink in. Don't shy from emphasizing the word "blessed" each time it recurs.

Speak the final beatitude with awareness that some in your pews have indeed been insulted and slandered for the sake of the Kingdom.

Although the passage ends with an imperative, let your tone make it an invitation to dream God's Kingdom dream.

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 Matthew 5:1–12a

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

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."**

GOSPEL

The Sermon on the Mount is the first of Jesus' discourses in Matthew's Gospel. In his first major teaching to his disciples, he gives them an overview of how they are to live as his community. By beginning with the beatitudes, Jesus offers his followers a challenging portrait, not only for those first followers gathered around them on the mountain, but for all who desire to be his disciples.

Jesus' Jewish audience would be familiar with beatitudes, statements of blessedness found frequently in the

psalms. In fact, the first word in the Book of Psalms is "blessed," echoed by the first word in Jesus' inaugural sermon. In both psalter and sermon, beatitudes announce God's gracious kindness, freely bestowed in the present, with expectations of future fullness. Such announcements of divine blessing give a sense of identity to those who live in their light. Taken as a whole, the beatitudes develop a portrait of a disciple. The dispositions, attitudes, and actions express the right relationship, with both God and other people.

The first beatitude is a foundation for the rest. Whether materially poor or living in grandeur and success, those who are poor in spirit rely on God as the ultimate source of life and every blessing. As they put their trust in God, the poor in spirit also share in God's care for all of creation. Thus, their mourning, meekness, hunger and thirst for justice, actions of mercy, and peace making are a participation on God's own providence. The Kingdom of heaven is theirs! E.P.