

LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS ALL SAINTS DAY, YEAR A
November 1, 2020
The Rt. Rev. Susan B. Haynes

Revelation 7:9-17

Psalm 34:1-10, 22

1 John 3:1-3

Matthew 5:1-12

Revelation 7:9-17

Many Christians fear the study of the Book of Revelation. They interpret it as a book about God's judgment and wrath. While those themes are present in Revelation, the overarching message of the writing is one of Hope, Deliverance and God's ultimate triumph over Evil. There could not be a more hopeful, joyful reading for God's saints on All Saints Day than the Book of Revelation. In this particular reading, we are given a snapshot of a celebration. The Lamb is sitting on the throne. Victory has been accomplished and all are celebrating. The number of lives assembled is so great that it cannot be counted or even imagined! And it is diverse – including folks from all tribes, peoples and languages. There is no exclusion in the Kingdom of Heaven. Those who have gathered are modeling worship as it will be in the Kingdom. There is some discussion about a group of people robed in white who seem to have a place of honor, and the onlooker (John) understands them to be those who have endured an "ordeal," those who have come through a rigorous horror that involved the losing of their lives for the sake of the faith. For them, there is a special reward of being able to gaze upon the lamb and laud him with palm branches and praises. And then there is the articulation of that Hope of which we all dream: we will belong to the lamb who will provide shelter, an end to hunger and thirst, an end to scorching sun and elements that garner death, an end to tears, an end to being lost.

We too are facing an "Ordeal," aren't we? To continue to persevere in our faith in the face of so many difficulties requires us to give our lives on so many levels. What would it be like to be free of all that assaults our peace and serenity during this Ordeal? What would it be like really to feel sheltered and safe? What would it take to keep your eyes focused on the Lamb that sits on the throne – the one who provides true shelter? What would it take to turn your gaze from the world's press and media and the empty heroes that we seek there so that we can focus on the One who truly can wipe away our tears?

Psalm 34:1-10, 22

When we feel like we are outside of God's shelter and provision...lost, hungry and thirsty, this is a good Psalm to recite. It reminds us that those who love and trust God will lack nothing. It reminds us that even though we face difficulties and perils, God stands ready to walk with us and deliver us. And even when we cannot sense God's presence, we can trust that His Angel "encompasses" us and goes with us. ***If you are particularly struggling with anxiety and worry during this time of pandemic and political unrest, make a commitment to recite this Psalm at the beginning of every morning while you enjoy your cup of coffee or tea. Then write a letter to God, thanking Him for his protection of you.***

1 John 3:1-3

We learned that the Book of Revelation is a book of Hope. But what is that hope? In this letter of John we connect with a hope for something that has not yet been revealed. Our hopes are for things we cannot yet see but we long to see them and in our heart of hearts expect to see them. What is this hope? Is it being children of God? Well, no, because we already ARE children of God. Being children of God is something we already see and have, so we don't have to hope for it. ***"Beloved, we are God's children NOW."*** The hope is in some greater thing that will be revealed when Christ is fully revealed. Then we will be like him. We will be like Christ. Until such time as that revelation, we are exhorted to purify ourselves.

While we wait for the full revelation of Christ (and ourselves), what can we do? How do we purify ourselves? Jesus invited those who followed him to pray – to engage in a relationship with God. In our Baptismal Promises, we pledge to continue this relationship with God. Do you have a program of prayer and study in which you engage on a daily basis to purify yourself and deepen your relationship with God? If you don't, and you would like one, talk with a priest, deacon, or trusted lay leader about how to develop one.

Matthew 5:1-12

What does it mean to be blessed? A blessing is a sign of favor bestowed on someone by another who gives his or her blessing. To receive the blessing of God is to be shown God's favor. Such a blessing would likely cause one to feel happy and fortunate. But the characteristics of those who would garner God's blessings are not attributes that our world values – meekness, poverty, mourning, purity, peacemaking, being persecuted for pursuing righteousness and justice. We don't associate these characteristics with those who are strong and conquering the world. And yet those who exhibit these characteristics are the ones who will get the Kingdom of God, the comfort, the Earth as an inheritance, food, water, mercy being able to see God, being able to be God's children. Those are the things that will show God's favor and blessing upon us. So if we should find ourselves outside the circle of the World's blessing, the world's favor, we should rejoice! This means that God's blessing on us is imminent. What matters is not how much the world values or honors us, but how little we conform to the world's expectations. Then we are able to see how much God values us.

Sometimes in the midst of life's difficulties, seeing our blessings is challenging. We lament that we don't seem to be successful by the world's standards. We feel a sense of emptiness and loneliness. But we must remind ourselves that God calls us to a different kind of blessing than what the world would bestow. We must become what he would call us to be...the saint that he made us to be. This requires a close walk with him...as closely as a child would walk with his or her parent. Then we will be able to step into the full stature of who God intends us to be. Who is waking beside you? Who is holding your hand and guiding you? The World? Or God?

COLLECT:

Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord: Give us grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.