

# A Sermon for All Saints

Revelation 7:9-end Matthew 5:1-12

By Revd Alan Meighen

So we come to this time of remembrance with All Saints today, back to back with All Souls tomorrow and Remembrance Sunday next week. And we remember our dear friend and sister in Christ, Mavis (may she rest in peace) whose funeral was last week. Mavis would often say, *'have you said your prayers?'* And that's a good question for us as I start this address. We are called to pray each day. It is through prayer that we draw closer to God and prayer increases our desire to be in God's presence. And, thinking of our Gospel, it is through continual prayer that we allow God to purify our hearts. This time of Covid 19, when we have some more time at our disposal, is an excellent opportunity to enhance and intensify our prayer life. At the outset of the lockdown I compiled a prayer sheet 'Praying together in isolation' which I know some of us have and are using. Just to flag up, as we approach the end of the church year, I'll prepare a fresh one for the Advent Season which Sarah will make available.

Anyway to this ancient feast of All Saints and our Gospel reading which is the Beatitudes. In our language the Beatitudes seem rather passive. I understand that in the original language of Aramaic which Jesus spoke they are much more active. More of a wakeup call to turn around, to do something, to get up and move; to be hands on to use a modern idiom. So to do mercy, to make peace, to be pure of heart. The Beatitudes are basically God's way of life, they are like a template for the Christian life, a picture of holiness and a profile of the saints. They are the virtues to which we should aspire. They are our vocation. We are called through our baptism to be saints, to shine as lights in the world to the glory of God. It is living the life of the Beatitudes that will lead us to be numbered with among that great and innumerable multitude; this multitude that our patron St John sees in the mysterious and fascinating vision described in our NT reading.

It is a vision of worship and the book of Revelation is supremely a vision of worship. So it is good that we resume Holy Communion in tandem with this powerful vision of worship. Because in our worship here and now, we join in with the worship in Heaven where God is continually calling his faithful to him – people of every nation and race.

Hey, last time I was here I was talking about wedding robes and how vital it is to have our wedding robe for the heavenly banquet. And today we're back to the clothing imagery because this multitude who are in the very presence of God, are in white robes. Curiously one of the elders in this vision asks John *'Who are these'* (!!!). I mean this elder is in heaven, he is actually in the vision. You could imagine John would say *'Why are you asking me, what are you asking me for.'* Anyhow John answers the elder respectfully saying *'Sir, YOU are the one that knows'* And then we are told that they are the ones who have gone through the great ordeal and who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

With my wife San's infirmity I am now the primary house worker and that includes the laundry. San does though retain a professional interest and issues the pertinent instructions. I remember when I was a law student (a lo-o-o-ong time ago!) you could count my visits to the laundrette on the fingers of one hand. Now, although there is only 2 of us, the washing machine is on every day. In fact last week the drum collapsed and we had to get it fixed. With my experience I know despite the hot water, the detergent and other additives and the washing cycle, some stains are practically impossible to remove. Especially red on white – think of red wine stains!

And if I started washing this white robe in blood San would have a fit. That's not going to make it clean, it's going to make horrible stains. But in our NT reading this multitude have made their robes white by washing them in the blood of the Lamb. This harks back to Jewish priests going into the Temple wearing white linen and sacrificing lambs and so their robes would be stained with the blood. St Peter says our salvation was purchased with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without spot or blemish. And as John the Baptist says – Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. It's the blood of Christ that washes and cleanses us from sin and makes us white. This blood takes away our stains. This wine that becomes blood takes away our stains, it cleanses our hearts.

Elisha Hoffman was an American Presbyterian minister in the nineteenth century. He wrote over 2,000 hymns. A notable one is entitled *'Are you washed in the Blood'*. It's a great question to us today..... as are other crucial questions Elisha poses in his hymn like – *'Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power?'* and there we can recall Mavis' question – *'have you said your prayers?'* His song goes on to ask us *'Are you walking daily by the Saviour's side?'* And finally *'When the Bridegroom comes will your robes be white'*.

In this reading from Revelation these people have been through the Great Ordeal. I think we can safely say that whatever other ordeals we may have in our

lives this coronavirus is proving to be the Great Ordeal for us. So what a great opportunity for us to see this challenging time as an extended and daily washing cycle for our souls. Remember that in the reading, the multitude had washed their robes. They had done something about their stained condition. Suffering of itself does not make us holy.

This vision St John sees, is of the abundance of the saved, an avalanche of white robed saints who fall down and worship before our Sovereign God and the slain Lamb. They are those who have gone before us. They are present with us now in this worship. They have suffered and triumphed over evil. In their lives they have, for example shown endurance and compassion, kindness and generosity, they have overcome racism, slavery and exploitation. They have been courageous. They have spoken the truth even if it means suffering for it. Our baptism calls us to be part of this. So are we living out the Beatitudes in our daily lives? Are we worshipping God not just in prayer but in every cranny of our lives? Are we realising that being with the Lamb, whose victory is from the blood on the Cross, means everything?

And just like the early and persecuted early church, we can take great comfort from this vision in Revelation. Because for the faithful the Lamb will be their shepherd and lead them to springs of the water of life and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Words of encouragement and hope. We know where God is taking us. I pray that as we move forward actively in our faith we may be washed whiter than snow.

Amen.