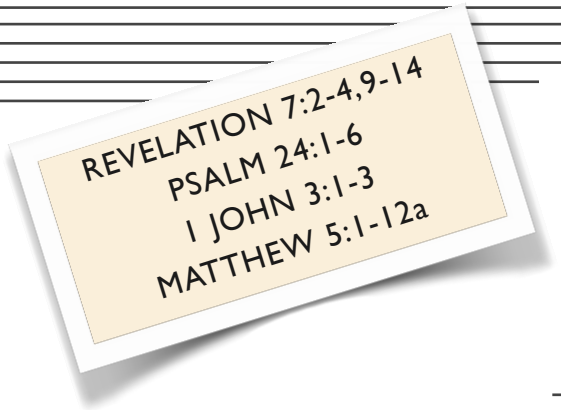
Our Sunday Readings



Be Saints

REVELATION 7:2-4,9-14

Reading closely

1. What imagery stands out to you?
2. What victory has occurred?
3. Who are the winners and losers?
4. Do you think this imagery frightens or reassures people?
5. Who in this passage would you want to be?

Living the word

6. Why do you think this passage was chosen for today's solemnity?

THE FIRST READING

Literature for the oppressed

The Book of Revelation is apocalyptic literature, a genre in which the author has a vision that he shares with those who are being persecuted. The author of Revelation uses this type of literature to urge Christians to resist the persecution and immorality of the Roman Empire. The Greek word *apocalypse* means *revelation* or *disclosure*.

Distorting God's word

Apocalyptic literature refers to past events; it is not a description of future ones. Because the imagery is grand in its scope while simultaneously vague, people try to make it apply to particular things that are happening during their lifetime. The very ambiguity of the book, however, allows people to apply it to the events of any era.

A vision of victory

Apocalyptic literature is jam-packed with numbers, images, and symbols.

- As God's angels prepare to unleash destruction from the *four corners* of the earth, God sends another angel to put his divine mark (***the seal***) on the faithful. These faithful ones will still suffer, but their suffering will end, and then they will share in Christ's eternal victory.
- ***144,000*** = 12 x 12 x 1,000
  This enormous increase of the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 disciples of Jesus represents the new Israel, the church.
- The new Israel is also the ***great multitude***, those who remain faithful to God despite their suffering.
- The (24) ***elders*** represent the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 disciples of Jesus.
- The ***four living creatures*** represent the best of creation.

MATTHEW 5:1-12a

Reading closely

1. Why do you think Jesus gives this teaching?
2. What kind of people do you imagine are in the crowd?
3. Discuss each beatitude.
   a. What does it mean?
   b. How might it reassure people?
   c. How might it challenge people?
4. How do these beatitudes speak about both the present and the future?
5. How do you think the people who hear these beatitudes for the first time react to them?

Living the word

6. Does one beatitude stand out to you? Why?
7. Make a list of cultural beatitudes. "Lucky are they who..." How is this list different from Jesus' beatitudes?
8. Why do you think this passage was chosen for today's solemnity?

THE GOSPEL READING

Up the mountain

Moses went up Mount Sinai to bring the law down to God's people. Jesus goes *up the mountain* to teach. Matthew thus presents Jesus as an authority figure as significant as Moses.

Jesus, however, is not a mediator of God's law but the Son of the law-giver. He teaches on his own authority. He freely interprets the law so that it reveals what life is like in God's kingdom. Jesus also teaches from a seated position, the customary posture of a teacher at that time.

What's a beatitude?

Beatitude comes from the Latin word for *blessed*. In the Old Testament people are happy because God has *blessed* them for acting justly (see Psalm 1, Proverbs 3:13, Sirach 14:1-2).

Jesus calls *blessed* people who feel excluded from God's promises, such as those who are destitute, have bad reputations, or are ridiculed for trying to live as God wants. Jesus surprises all of them by saying that God welcomes them into his kingdom.

Good news

People are blessed for thinking and acting in ways that conform to God's will. Such people can rejoice that God will bring them into his kingdom. (Jewish law forbids people from saying God's name, so Matthew uses the phrase *kingdom of heaven*.)

These beatitudes also challenge people to embrace new perspectives and behaviors.

- the *poor in spirit* and *the meek* fully trust in God; they wait rather than try to force God to act
- those who *long for righteousness* yearn for God to set things right in the world
- the *clean* or *pure of heart* think, speak, and act uprightly; they aren't, for example, kind on the outside but mean on the inside
- Verses 11-12 probably reflect the animosity that grew between Jews and the followers of Jesus. Matthew wrote his Gospel when Christianity was separating from Judaism.

Why do we venerate saints?

The Catholic Church's practice of honoring people who have died began with the veneration of martyrs. The process of declaring someone a *Saint* was formalized during the Middle Ages and revised by John Paul II. By canonizing people, the Church...

- affirms our hope in eternal life
- urges us to call upon more people to pray for us
- provides models of faith
- reminds us that no matter how challenging our circumstances, there is a way to live the gospel

PRAYER

Collect for the Solemnity of All Saints

Almighty ever-living God,
by whose gift we venerate in one celebration
the merits of all the Saints, bestow on us, we pray,
through the prayers of so many intercessors,
an abundance of the reconciliation with you
for which we earnestly long.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who
lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy
Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.