

Solemnity of All Saints

The Book of Revelation 7:2-4, 9-17

11/4/2012

‘Grant O Lord that Thy Word only may be spoken and Thy Word only received, ✠ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.’

“Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads.”(verse 3)

- I. In seminary they suggested it might not be the best call to preach on the Book of Revelation. And for the most part I have avoided it. But today let me go out on a limb. My text for today’s Homily is Verse 3 of the Epistle from the 7th chapter of the Book of Revelation. Toward the end of the Baptismal Office the priest with the thumb of his right hand and Holy Oil (Chrism consecrated by the Bishop), makes the sign of the cross on the child’s forehead saying “ N. you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ’s own forever. Amen.” Then the newly baptized are welcomed by everyone in the congregation saying: “We receive you into the household of God, confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim His resurrection, and share with us in His eternal priesthood.”

Thus the same seal and the same community of faith are present now, as it was in the reading we heard today from the Book of Revelation. For when the priest asks for the child's name and baptizes with water in the name of the Most Holy Trinity- the gift of Eternal Life is bestowed as a grace from God's own hand...just as the Holy Spirit descended from the Father as a dove onto Jesus at His Baptism by John the Baptist. So to us as Catholic Christians, Baptism is synonymous with the bestowal of Eternal Life- the moment we are washed white in the Blood of the Lamb.

II. The Book of Revelation presents us today with two visions. The first vision happens on Earth. An Angel comes from the East, which is the direction Holy Scripture teaches us our Messiah and Salvation will come. The practice of looking to the East is ancient in the Liturgy (Worship) of the Church. Even when buildings could not be built on an East-West axis- the Liturgy still spoke of the direction to worship as being 'liturgical east' with the priest and people all facing the same direction. The modern practice of the priest facing West across the Altar was rare, if not unheard of in early Christian History. Not until the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church in 1965 did this direction become popular. Although we are possibly the last

parish in the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago to continue the practice of an East-facing celebration of the Mass, we do so with the greater part of Christian History behind our practice.

The Book of Revelation wants us to understand the symbolism in facing East is not only the direction from which Jesus will come again, but a tangible ritual & ceremony proclaiming we turn away from the world and towards heaven to find our purest worship of Almighty God. We face heaven to declare- we neither worship the things of the world, nor wish to be drawn into its Evil. Revelation is encouraging us then, to consider “HOW” we live as Christians until He comes again. While it is true we are both simultaneously Saints and Sinners, we look toward being only Saints.

- III. For the world we know is full of Evil, but Heaven only of Gods Love. To claim His own, God has sent His Angels to mark us with the cross as “His own forever”. This seal is to protect us from the Avenging Angels who would like to gain our souls for Hell. The seal is a powerful image- a mark of the authentic, like a document sealed with wax, or in modern times a stamp to show authentic ownership, the very origin of the signet ring used to mark documents as the original from any copy or forgery.

The second vision of Revelation today takes place NOT on earth, but in Heaven. There we are shown the saints in white robes holding Palm Branches gathered in worship around God's Throne. The white robe and palm branches are the traditional symbols of Victory. A conquering General would ride into the city he won in battle dressed in a white garment while the people would throw and wave palm branches in his honor. We see that, don't we, on Palm Sunday with Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. It is the reason" why" the newly baptized are clothed in white and receive a white towel or vesture from the priest. The Baptized Saints in Heaven wear white robes- a gift of our Communion of Saints through the waters of Holy Baptism.

- IV. Thus the Sacrament of Holy Baptism is God's Act- not mine, it is a gift, not earned or deserved. Through it God supernaturally extends to us the forgiveness of Original Sin and Incorporation into the living Body of Christ- His One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. There is NO magic here. Rather it is a generous amount of the mystery of our God Himself, loving and bringing us home to His original purposes from the beginning of creation.
- On All Saints our responsibility is to acknowledge the gift we have been given. The First Letter of St. John (3:1) says it so perfectly-

“Beloved see what love the Father has bestowed on us, that we may be called ‘Children of God’. Children of God! My brothers and sisters: what a gift of hope we have in Christ! Should we not strive to fulfill this gift of Sainthood? All Saints celebrates all those thousands of Saints in Heaven whose name has no date on the Calendar, but who no less stand around the Throne of God, clothed in white robes, holding palm branches, worshiping Him day and night with the angelic host, in pure light, with the censer bowls full of sweet smells swinging continuously. Is it any wonder our own liturgy strives to show forth this same wonder? For this is the ‘vast assembly’ God has claimed as ‘His own’- marked by the Holy Spirit as ‘His own’- Christened in the Joy of the Communion of Saints. NOW the invitation you see is to us! Be Saints of God- live your Baptism, marked as Christ’s own forever.

“Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads.”(verse 3)

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