

All Saints' Day

(1 November)

First Lesson: Revelation 7: (2-8) 9-17

St. John is on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, southwest of Ephesus—now present-day Turkey, exiled there for his **witnessing** to the truth of Jesus the Christ. One Sunday morning, **Jesus** appears to him in all his **glory**, with the instruction to write down **letters** to the seven churches in Asia Minor that Jesus is now going to dictate.

But the dictation is followed by a vision of the **end times**, which in reality is the **New Testament** period. But today's reading focuses on what is happening in **heaven**. St. John has just seen the events that take place on earth after Jesus opens six seals of a scroll, five of those six seals revealing **major disasters** occurring on the earth in order to get people to **repent** and **believe** in Jesus. Then he hears an **angel** calling out to four angels ready to harm the earth and seas to **not** proceed until the Children of God have been **sealed**, or identified, with **God's** seal. That number is identified as **144,000**, which probably represents in numerology the **complete** number of God's Children (12 times 12 x 1000 = 144,000 being completeness times completeness times completeness). But then St. John's attention is turned to events in **heaven**. He sees a crowd from **every** tribe, nation, people, language, or ethnic group, that **no** one can number, standing before the throne of God and Jesus, all clothed in **white robes**, giving **praise** to God by saying that only **God** was able to save mankind from their sin. Even the **angels** and all **other** creatures in heaven also give praise to God.

When one of the heavenly elders asks John if he knows **who** the people in white robes are, St. John admits that he has **no** idea. So the elder tells him: they are the **believers**, members of the true Church throughout **history**, who have paid the price for their **faith** of gaining salvation only through the **gift** of Jesus' substitutionary death. And part of God's reward to them includes the following:

- God will **shelter** them with his presence,
- they shall **neither hunger nor thirst** any more,
- they shall **never lack protection**, even from nature,
- God will lead them to **living water**, and
- God himself will wipe away every **tear**, every remembrance, of their suffering.

Epistle Lesson: 1 John 3: 1-3

As St. John writes to the Christians of the **first** century, he **reassures** them of the **love** that God the Father has already shown them: they are his children **now!** **And so are we!** The reason that we are now treated as **foreigners** by the rest of the world is because the **rest** of **the world** does **not** know the Father, therefore are not of his **family**.

But St. John **also** notes that while we are God's children **now**, we do not know what kind of **form** we will have when Jesus appears. All we **do** know is that we will be **like** Jesus. Therefore, as God's children, we keep ourselves **pure** as we look forward to that day when Jesus appears for us.

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 5: 1-12

Jesus has just called his **first** disciples, and he has started his ministry by traveling and teaching throughout **Galilee**. Word about him spreads **fast**, particularly his healing of **all** those who were sick. Consequently, people from all over Galilee, Judea, the Decapolis (on the eastern side of the Jordan River), and even **Syria** come to him, bringing their **sick** with them. As another crowd gathers around him, Jesus decides to **teach** them some basics of **moral and ethical living**. So, going up the side of a mountain so that what he says can be heard by the crowd below him, he first of all notes who are **blessed by God**:

- those who recognize that they are **spiritually** needy,
- those who are **sorry** for their spiritual state,
- those who are **gentle** in heart, looking out for others,
- those who **seek God** with all their heart,
- those who are **kind and forgiving**,
- those who pursue a life of **righteousness**,
- those who bring **God's** peace to their neighbors,
- those who are **used and abused** by those who take advantage of their **gentleness**, and
- those who are deprived of **life, liberty, reputation, wealth, and pursuit of happiness** because they are Children of God. In fact, Jesus tells

his listeners that if this is the case, **rejoice**, be **glad**, even **leap** for **joy**, because they will reap a great reward in heaven, just as persecuted prophets of **old** did.

Sunday on 6 - 12 November (Proper 27)

Old Testament Lesson: 1 Kings 17: 8-16

It is around 865 B.C. **King Ahab**—yes, that one, whose wife was **Jezebel**—was now reigning over the **Northern** Kingdom, or **Israel**, and had not only continued the worship of the **two golden calves** made by King Jeroboam, but had also introduced worship of the **Baals and Asherahs**, the male and female gods of fertility, whose worship involved the burning **alive** of infants and children, in addition to very kind of **prostitution**. God then calls **Elijah** to represent his interests to King Ahab. Elijah's first message is that, because of King Ahab's blatant **apostasy**, **no** rain would fall on Israel until Elijah said so. An immediate **drought** ensues. Since this affects Elijah as well, God sends him back to his native Gilead, **east** of the Jordan River, where God has **ravens** bring him bread and meat while he lives by a river, which provides water to him. Eventually, however, the river dries up, so God sends him west and north to a village near Sidon, on the Mediterranean coast. There, God tells Elijah, he has arranged for a widow (a **Gentile**, someone who did **not** worship the true God) to feed him.

When Elijah arrives in the village of Zarephath, there just happens to be a widow gathering sticks to bake one **last** meal for herself and her son, since she has only **enough** flour and oil to make that last small meal. But Elijah tells her to make a meal for him **first**, telling her that **God** would replenish the flour and oil for her and her son until the day that the drought ends.

Oh yeah. Who is going to believe **this** hairy, bearded **stranger** with a leather belt around his waist? Amazingly, the widow **does** as Elijah instructs, and sure enough, there not only is flour and oil for her that day, but there is flour and oil for Elijah, the widow, and her family until the drought **ends**. But this does not **yet** convince the widow to turn to the worship of the true God. To find out what happens next, you'll have to finish this chapter at home.

Epistle Lesson: Hebrews 9: 24-28

The author of Hebrews is trying to show his readers/hearers that the **sacrifices** prescribed by God for the Children of Israel are a **picture** of the coming sacrifice of the Messiah, but with some **significant differences**. Here again he points out that the **shedding** of Jesus' blood on the cross allowed Jesus to go to heaven with that blood, enter the **original tabernacle** (the one **not** made by human hands), and in the presence of God the Father, **sprinkle his blood** on the "ark" (where God dwells) and on the altar, having to do this just **once** in order to take away the sin of **all** who believe in him from **all** ages. This is in contrast to the **Old Testament** priests, who had to enter the Holy Place and sprinkle blood on the ark, and then on the altar, **every year** on the Day of Atonement. Thus Jesus appeared **once** in human flesh to mankind to take away sin by the sacrifice of **himself**, but when he comes again, it will be in **judgment** of mankind and to **take with him** to heaven those who have **believed** in him. In a somewhat similar fashion, mankind will live and die **once**, and after that will be **judged**.

Gospel Lesson: Mark 12: 38-44

Jesus has been in Jerusalem, having his **usual** encounters with the scribes and Pharisees, including the most **recent** one where he was asked which of the commandments was the greatest. Apparently, Jesus' response to that question caused the scribes to **retreat** for a time, because Jesus takes this opportunity to warn the crowd against **emulating** the scribes, who supposedly were the **spiritual examples**. He points out that the scribes like to make a **big show** of their religiosity by walking around in long robes, receiving greetings of **honor and respect** in the marketplace as well as in the synagogues and feasts, where they always ended up in the seats of **honor**. And then to distract the people from the fact that **their** rules are depriving widows of their **inheritance**, they make long prayers **in public**. Such **hypocrisy**, Jesus observes, will receive appropriate **punishment**.

Then Jesus sat down near the Treasury. There was a **box** near the entrance of the Temple, into which people dropped their required **contributions** as well as their **gifts and offerings**. While he was sitting there, Jesus observed many rich people ostentatiously drop **large** sums of money into the box (**2 Kings 12:1-16, 22:3-7**), undoubtedly to the **admiration** of those watching. But then a **poor widow** humbly creeps by the box to drop in her two small coins. **Immediately** Jesus calls his disciples' attention to this situation, noting that the widow put in **more** than all the others, because she had given **all** that she had while the others only gave a **fraction** of their wealth.

The bottom line: how **totally committed** are **we** to the furtherance of the Kingdom of God?

Sunday on 13 - 19 November (Proper 28)

Old Testament Lesson: Daniel 12: 1-3

This section of the book of **Daniel** is absolutely **amazing**. Today's story actually starts two chapters earlier, in **chapter ten**, where we are told that Daniel fasted and prayed for **three weeks**. In response to Daniel's prayers, God sends an **angel** who gives to Daniel a preview of the **rest of time**, starting from the time of Daniel to what many believe to be Judgment Day. You need to read this whole episode, so get yourselves a good **study Bible** and read **chapters 10-13 of Daniel** when you get home.

Anyway, today's reading begins with that angel telling Daniel that, **at that time** (apparently, the end of time), the **great angel Michael** (believed to be the one responsible for **believers**) will arise to **help** believers, because that will be a time of **great persecution**. In the end, however, believers will be taken to **heaven**—everyone whose name is written in the **Book of Life**. And there will be a resurrection of **all of the dead**—some to **life** everlasting, the others to everlasting **punishment**. But those who accepted **Jesus' righteousness** will shine like the **stars** in the sky.

Epistle Lesson: Hebrews 10: 11-25

Here again the author of **Hebrews** compares the **Old Testament** priests with Jesus **our** high priest, noting that the Old Testament priest had to make sacrifice after sacrifice, since those sacrifices had **no capability** to take away sins. In contrast, the sacrifice of Jesus needed to be made only **once**, since it **took away sins for all time** from those who believe in Jesus' substitutionary death. With that sacrifice, God made a **new covenant** with his people: God would put his laws in the hearts and minds of his children, and he would **remember their sins no more**. In other words, **since their sins are forgiven, there is no further need for a sacrifice**.

The net effect of Jesus' sacrifice is that he opened for us a **direct line** to God the Father. In addition, Jesus serves as **our high priest**. Given this, there is no reason why we cannot **go directly to God in full faith and with a cleansed**

conscience, holding tightly (*i.e.*, through thick and thin) to the **hope** that we have in Christ Jesus. In addition, we should be sure to **meet together regularly** with other believers, not only to **worship** our wonderful God but also to **encourage** each other to do **acts of love and good works**. And we should do this even **more** zealously as we see that the Last Day is approaching **rapidly**.

Gospel Lesson: Mark 13: 1-13

After the episode at the **Treasury** box at the entrance to the Temple that we read about last week, Jesus and his disciples left the temple courtyard and headed out to the **Mount of Olives**, which lies on a hillside just **opposite** the Temple itself. But as they leave the temple courtyard, one of Jesus' disciples remarks on the **beauty** of the temple and the **stones** from which it is made. Jesus responds that **everything** they see will be torn down.

So when they reach the Mount of Olives, four of Jesus' closest disciples ask him privately when all of this **destruction** will take place. Jesus' response indicates that he was talking about a **spiritual** thing, that is, once **his** sacrifice was made, there would no longer be a need for a **temple** in which to offer sacrifices. This would be the **New Testament period**. But the New Testament period is also described as the "**end times**," so Jesus then proceeds to describe what the end times will be like:

- **false prophets** will be common, declaring themselves to be the messiah, trying to lead people **astray** by following him or her
- there not only will be **wars** and **prospects** of wars, but kingdoms and **nations will fight** against each other for whatever reason
- there will be **earthquakes, famines**, and all sorts of **natural disasters**, but that is just the **beginning** of the end.

Then Jesus addresses the disciples' more immediate concerns: that they will **face councils, be beaten** in the synagogues, and **witness** before high-ranking government officials, all in order to **proclaim the name of Jesus** to **all** nations. He **reassures** them to not be **anxious** about what to say, because the **Holy Spirit** will give them the proper words at **just the right time**. But then Jesus warns them that **as believers**, they should not be surprised if their own **family betrays** them to those who **hate** them and want to put them to death. Just **endure to the end!**

Sunday on 20 - 26 November (Proper 29), or Last Sunday of the Church Year

Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 51: 4-6

Isaiah was one of God's messengers to the **Southern** Kingdom, or **Judah**, around the time that the **Northern** Kingdom met its demise. His messages were calls to **repentance** as well as promises of **restoration** to those who repented. Today's reading contains both **a warning and a prophecy** about the coming Messiah. When that Messiah comes, then the following will occur:

- there will be **justice and light** for the peoples,
- **salvation** will finally be available to the peoples, and
- God **himself** will judge the peoples in **righteousness**.

And this will come at a time when people **everywhere** will be looking for God to **intervene**. Then God tells the hearers of Isaiah to picture themselves in the **heavens**, and to look down on the earth and the rest of creation: **all** of that will disappear in a puff of smoke, but **God's words** will remain, his **righteousness** will not be frustrated, and his **salvation** will be effective forever.

Epistle Lesson: Jude 20-25

Jude, or Judas, the brother of James and "brother" of Jesus, writes to Christians **everywhere** to continue to **contend for the faith** and to **encourage others** to remain **true** to the faith. In today's reading, he encourages his readers/hearers to **build themselves up** in the faith through diligence in **prayers** guided by the **Holy Spirit**, and keeping themselves in the **love** of God by **remaining pure** as they wait for Jesus' **return**.

By the same token, they should show **mercy** on those who still have doubts, and to snatch from the **evil one** those who are **receptive** to the gospel. As for those who **resist God**, show **mercy** to them while hating the garments of **wickedness** that they wear.

Then Jude pronounces a ***blessing on Jesus***, the one who can ***keep*** us from stumbling, who is able to present us ***blameless*** to his Father: may glory, majesty, dominion, and authority for all time be his!

Gospel Lesson: Mark 13: 24-37

Jesus continues to tell his closest disciples about what will be the signs of his return. Last Sunday, we heard about the signs that would indicate the ***beginning*** of the end. In today's reading, Jesus gives a description of what the signs of ***the*** end will be. They include

- ***tribulation***,
- ***darkening*** of the sun and moon,
- stars ***falling*** from the heavens, and
- ***shaking*** of the ***powers*** in the heavens (perhaps referring to the ***demonic*** forces realizing that their time is up).

It is ***then*** that people will see ***Jesus*** coming in the ***clouds*** in full power and glory, with ***angels*** going out before him to gather ***all believers*** to him, wherever they may be. Then Jesus states that “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” But what does he mean by ***“this generation?”*** Probably it pertains to the people of the ***New Testament*** period. In any case, Jesus makes it ***plain*** that his words are ***true***.

Jesus then goes on to make ***another*** curious statement: only the ***Father*** knows ***exactly*** when that last hour will come. But that can be explained by the fact that the ***incarnate*** Jesus was speaking, not the begotten Son of the Father. Still, this statement is a ***warning*** to the disciples, as well as to ***all*** believers, to ***be on guard***, not to be caught ***napping*** while they are indulging into ***sinful earthly*** pleasures. Believers must ***remain pure and keep the faith until the very end***.

Sunday on November 20-26 (Proper 29), Alternate Readings

Alternate Old Testament Lesson: Daniel 7: 9-10 and 13-14

Daniel has been appointed **governor** of the province of Babylon and **head** of **all** of Babylon's wise men by King Nebuchadnezzar, because God had given him the **wisdom** and **ability** to interpret **dreams, visions**, and other **supernatural** events. King Nebuchadnezzar and his successor, King Nabonidus, have come and gone, and reigning now is King Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, King Belshazzar, the one who would eventually throw a party that ended with the **handwriting** on the wall. During King Belshazzar's **first** year as king, however, Daniel had a **dream** in which he saw **four successive animals**, representing human kingdoms of time, the **last** of which was followed by a vision of **heaven** in which he saw **God the Father** sitting on his throne in all his glory, majesty, and might, **surrounded** by all his subjects. Then the **court proceedings** begin, and the record books are opened. Subsequently in his vision, Daniel sees the Christ, the **Son of Man**, presented to God the **Father**, here called the "**Ancient of Days**," who gives to the Christ dominion, glory, and an **everlasting** kingdom in which **all** peoples, nations, and languages would serve him.

Alternate Epistle Lesson: Revelation 1: 4b-8

St. John is on the island of Patmos, in the Aegean Sea, just off the **southwest** coast of **present-day** Turkey, exiled there for his **witnessing** to the reality of Jesus as the Christ. As our reading for today begins, St. John tells his readers and listeners that he is writing a letter to the seven major churches in Asia Minor of events that are **about** to happen. He then greets the readers and listeners with a **blessing** of the Triune God, ending with **praise** to Jesus who loved us so much that he **freed** us from the **consequences** of our sin by **dying in our place**, thus making us **citizens** of his kingdom and **priests** to **God**. Then he notes that Jesus is coming "**soon**," certainly soon to the readers and hearers in human terms, but also certainly soon to the world from **God's** perspective. But when Jesus comes in the latter case, **everyone** will see him and will **wail**, because they suddenly realize that the time to choose **whom** they will serve is already

over. This then ends with **Jesus** saying that he is the **beginning** and the **end**, the one who **is**, who **was**, and who **is to come**.

Following today's reading, St. John describes his **vision** of Jesus, who then dictates seven letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor. Note that the number "**seven**" is considered the number for completeness, so that it might be reasonably assumed that **all** of the churches at that time would benefit from the reading of these seven letters, contained in chapters two and three of **Revelation**. On the other hand, it might also be reasonably assumed that **all** churches of **all time** who identify themselves as **Christian** would benefit from the reading of these seven letters, asking after each letter whether the words of Jesus pertain to **them**. This might be an interesting exercise for all who hear these words.

Alternate Gospel Lesson: John 18: 33-37

It is Maundy Thursday. Jesus has been **betrayed** by Judas, and he has appeared before the **Jewish Council** overnight. Now, early in the morning, he is presented to Pilate with the Jews' demand that Jesus be put to **death**. When Pilate asks what the **basis** of their demand is, the Jews only reply that Jesus is an evil man. As our reading begins, we find Pilate interrogating Jesus as to why he is so **hated** by the Jews. Apparently somewhere along the way, the Jews have mentioned that Jesus claims to be their **king**. So Pilate asks Jesus whether he **is** the king of the Jews. Jesus first of all ascertains that it **was** the Jews who brought up this issue. Then Jesus says that, yes, he **is** the king of the Jews, but that his kingdom is not of **this** world. If it **were**, his servants would have been fighting to ensure that he would **not** be delivered over to the Jews. Then Jesus explains that he was born for this **very purpose**: to come into the world in order to bear witness to the **truth**.

You really have to feel sorry for Pilate. What Jesus just said must have sounded like **science fiction** to him. And so it should be no surprise that Pilate then asks Jesus: what **is** truth?

And that is the question that each one of **us** must ultimately answer. In fact, it is a **life-or-death** question!

Day of Thanksgiving

Old Testament Lesson: Deuteronomy 8: 1-10

Because earlier, Moses had ***disobeyed*** God, God ***forbade*** him from leading the Children of Israel into the Promised Land. They are all now on the Plains of Moab, across the Jordan River from Jericho. Moses knows that his ***life*** can now be measured in ***days***. So he takes this opportunity to make a ***farewell*** speech to the Children of Israel, reviewing the previous forty years and emphasizing the ***goodness*** of God toward them and now the ***expectations*** of God of them.

As our reading for today begins, Moses has just reviewed their ***agreement*** with God, the Ten Commandments, and reminded them that they are a ***holy*** nation, *i.e.* ***set apart*** for service to God. He now commands them to ***keep*** the agreement that they have made with God, especially to ***love*** the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind; and to ***remember*** how God led and ***tested*** them in the desert in order that they might remain ***humble***. In particular, they were to remember how God ***took care*** of their ***every*** need in ***miraculous*** ways. So now, as they were about to enter a land of ***plenty***, an extremely ***fertile*** land, they were to remember always to ***bless*** God for what He had ***given*** them.

Epistle Lesson: Philippians 4: 6-20

In today's lesson, St. Paul tells his Philippian converts to rejoice not only in their **salvation** but also in the fact that they no longer need to be **anxious** about **anything**, since God is there to receive **and** hear the prayers of his children. Consequently, **peace** instead of anxiety will be in their hearts.

Then St. Paul makes some suggestions on how **we** can order **our** thought life.

He makes a list of things we **should** think about: things that are

- honorable, —just — pure — lovely
- commendable —excellent —worthy of praise.

He then tells them (and **us!**) to **practice** what they learned and saw in himself:

- to be **content**, no matter the **circumstance**, whether it is abundance or need.

After all, St. Paul notes, he can do **all** things through Christ who **strengthens** him. But then St. Paul **praises** the Philippians for their continued **support** of him in his ministry, no matter **where** he was. And he **thanks** them profusely for their care of him. As a consequence, he notes, their good fruit is being **credited** to them by God, and **He** will supply **every** need of theirs according to His riches in glory because of Christ Jesus, for which they all will give **glory** to God the Father.

Alternate Epistle Lesson: 1 Timothy 2: 1-4

As he gives instruction to his protege, Timothy, who was left in charge of the new church in Ephesus, St. Paul urges them **and us** to **pray** and **give thanks** for all governmental, commercial, academic, and religious authorities, not only for **our** benefit but also that these people might be **saved**. After all, God desires that **all** people should be saved and come to a knowledge of the **truth**.

Gospel Lesson: Luke 17: 11-19

This well-known story of Jesus healing the ten **lepers** illustrates that **faith**, despite trying circumstances, is **honored** by God, especially if we remember to thank God for **his** faithfulness to **us**. The curious feature of this story is that only **one** leper came back to thank Jesus for the healing, and he was a **foreigner**. This prompted Jesus to ask where the other nine, presumably Children of Israel, were. Jesus noted the faith of foreigners as against his own people **several** times in the course of his ministry, one of the most notable being the **Canaanite** woman from the region of Tyre and Sidon (**Matthew 15: 21-28**) who kept following Jesus, begging him to cure her daughter of a demon. Jesus' response: it's not right to give the children's bread to the **dogs**, in effect saying healing was for the Children of Israel, not for **foreigners**. But the woman came right back with the response that even the **dogs** lick the **crumbs** that fall from the children's table, in effect saying that she would be happy with just some **crumbs** of healing. The key here is the woman's **attitude: humility**. She knew that she did not **deserve** mercy, but pleaded anyway for God's **grace**.

On the other hand, getting back to our present story, the **nine lepers**, presumably Jesus' countrymen, seemed to have a **different** attitude. Perhaps like the Pharisees (see **John 8**), they thought that since they were the children of Abraham and were God's **chosen** people (**Ex. 19:5-6**), they were **entitled** to be healed—it was their **due**. Hence they would have no **need** to thank Jesus for the healing.

So the bottom line for this lesson might very well be the answer to these questions:

- How grateful are **you** for all the grace and mercy that God has shown to you over your lifetime?
- And how **grateful** are you for the blessings showered on you by **others**?
- And how have you **demonstrated** that gratitude to **God?** To **others**?