Feast of All Saints, Year A
A Sermon Preached by Fr Ian M Delinger
on November 1, 2026

Revelation 7:9-17 / Psalm 34:1-10, 22 / 1 John 3:1-3 / Matthew 5:1-12

May I speak,
and may we all hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church,
in the name of the Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier.

Happy All Saints' Day – the day the Church "*Commemorates all saints, known and unknown*"[1]. In our Gospel reading, Jesus opens the Sermon on Mount by giving us a picture of those to whom the blessings of the Divine belong: those whose lives are humble at best, and challenging day-by-day at worst. And in our reading from Revelation, we have the drama of the Kingdom of Heaven, the place where we presume these "blessed" folks dwell once they depart this earthly world.

The saints in the Church are those whom we hold in high esteem for their contributions to the life of the Church and the furthering of the Gospel – in both words and actions. As one reference stated: a saint is "*the sanctified and exemplary individual*". And while the role of the saints within the life and worship of the Church is mixed because there is not sufficient scriptural warrant, as Anglicans, we hold up the pre-Reformation saints and the post-Reformation commemorations as models for Christian living.

As we honor the saints today, I want to explore the drama of the Kingdom of Heaven as we experience it through the Book of Revelation, and the idea of the "saints unknown."

We step into Revelation as the 7 Seals are being opened. I would say that it's a very exciting time, filled with lots of drama and intrigue, but the entirety of the Book of Revelation is filled with lots of drama and intrigue. But this particular moment is between the opening of the 6th and 7th Seals – "7" being the number of

[1] An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church, "All Saints' Day"

perfection. Everything in Revelation is intertwined, but let me try to unpack and summarize what happens when each of the 7 Seals are opened.

- The opening of the first 4 Seals releases the Four Horsemen:
    - A white horse with a rider with a bow who came out conquering and to conquer.
    - A bright red horse with a rider who was permitted to take peace from the earth – result = not good!
    - A black horse with a rider with the scales of fair commerce.
    - A pale green horse with a rider whose name was Death, with Hades following. Again, result = not good.
- The opening of the 5th Seal releases the cries of martyrs who are to wait for future martyrs.
- The 6th Seal "*there came a great earthquake; the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood*".

And that's where our story sits. The 12,000 servants of God from each of the 12 Tribes of Israel are enumerated, and then the blessed are extoled, as we heard. The 7th Seal initiates the activity of 7 angelic trumpeters, and then the 7 bowl judgments and more cataclysmic events. It's all very apocalyptic! It may seem frightening, but believe it or not, this was meant to be *reassuring* to Christians on earth. This vision that John had was not so much about the destruction of the earth. It was more about the destruction of *evil* and the reign of Christ at God's right hand.

I remember watching the 1988 film *The Seventh Sign* starring Demi Moore. It was pretty bad, and it focused on the unfolding of the Book of Revelation and the destruction of the earth. But from a 1C Christian context, the destruction of *evil* would have been a triumphant moment. Even with our classical Christian theology of today, we should welcome the destruction of evil. Perhaps it doesn't have to be so graphic and violent. But this is what we have in Revelation. The destruction of evil will be just as violent as the propagation of evil, except this

battle is in Heaven while simultaneously wreaking havoc on earth. And in the middle of all of it are the saints!

> *There was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!"*

So, the saints are playing a role in the Kingdom of Heaven and in the destruction of evil. I can envision St Stephen – our own patron – up there battling evil by "*doing great wonders and signs among the people*" and reciting Salvation History from Abraham to Jesus, as he did in Acts 7. And Stephen definitely fits the definition of "saint" with his exceptional innocence and unworldliness, and who, in his very brief ministry, maintained the right bit of detachment from society and its values. Stephen was firmly focused on Christ and Resurrection through Christ.

If the saints are playing a role in the Kingdom of Heaven and in the destruction of evil, who are the saints, in particular, the "*unknown saints*"? If the Church of England's introduction to the Feast of All Saints is any indication, the "*unknown saints*" might be sitting in these pews with us.

> *Through baptism we become members one of another in Christ, members of a company of saints whose mutual belonging transcends death. All Saints' Day celebrates men and women in whose lives the Church as a whole has seen the grace of God powerfully at work … Those who are Christ's, whether or not they have passed through death, are joined in prayer that God's kingdom will be revealed finally and in all its fullness.*
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> ➔ *Those who are Christ's, whether or not they have passed through death, are joined in prayer that God's kingdom will be revealed finally and in all its fullness.*

We gather today to commemorate those noble and sanctified and exemplary individuals we call saints, all of whom we presume to have died after serving Christ and God's Children here on earth. Yet, to us, as members of the Body of Christ, the door to sainthood has been left open. In good ol' Anglican fashion, it is ambiguously clear and clearly ambiguous that, as members of the Body of Christ – whether or not we have passed through death – we have some sort of role in the Kingdom of Heaven and in the destruction of evil.

And as potential saints, we can learn more about our role through this Revelation to John. It's a vision of the hope for a better world, urgently prompting us to live the Kingdom of Heaven, rather than be complicit in the injustice and self-centeredness we experience in the world around us.

Many of the saints lived the reality of the everyday suffering in the world, the martyrdom for faith and for convictions, gave their lives over to Christ in order tackle head on the unjust world we see around us. Not all saints are called to be martyrs, but we are all called to suffer in some way for the spreading of the Gospel. We are *all* God's children, and in what ways we are or will be saints has not yet been revealed.

As we remember the saints who have gone before, we also give thanks for the grace that we have received as members of the Body of Christ as we are encouraged by their examples of how extraordinary ministries can grow out of the ordinary circumstances of human living. [2]

And our reading from Revelation gives us a reminder that redemption is a work of God's grace. And we await for the final consummation of God's new creation in Christ – the fruition of the epic battle between the Church Triumphant and evil. As potential saints, we hear these words with both, fear and trembling, and with the knowledge of the unutterable goodness and holiness of God and the

[2] Common Worship Times & Seasons: All Saints' to Advent: Introduction to the Season

experience God's mercy.[3] Our reading from Revelation can awaken and transform us into action for justice and peace *on earth* as the Church Militant, as we bear prophetic witness to the action for justice and peace *in Heaven* that the Church Triumphant undertakes for us day-by-day.

So, we pray:

> *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.*

As we give thanks for the lives of the saints who live the drama of waging the war against evil, and as we ponder who the saints are and who they will be, and as we strive to live lives worthy of being saints ourselves, let us remember that the work of the Body of Christ: The Church Triumphant and the Church Militant, is that all God's people:

> *will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*

And from your eyes and my eyes, too.

[3] Common Worship Times & Seasons: All Saints' to Advent: Introduction to the Season