

All Saints' Day and All Saints' Sunday
Cycle A RCL

Revelation 7:9-17

Revelation 7 contains two visions (7:1-8 and 7:9-17) between the opening of the sixth seal (6:12-17) and the seventh seal (8:1-5). The number of the servants of God, 144,000, is of military significance, a heavenly army made up of 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes. The second vision has all of the redeemed standing before the divine throne. White was the color of celebration in the Roman world, and apocalyptic visions often portray the residents of the heavenly world as so attired. Some modern scholars have contended that the hymns this company sings before the throne are familiar Christian hymns known to the readers in Asia Minor from their own worship

Psalms 34:1-10, 22

This extended *thanksgiving* would be uttered aloud in the Temple in fulfillment of a vow made to God when praying for deliverance in a *lament*. The psalm recalls that the psalmist called upon the LORD in the midst of terror (vs. 4) and was delivered from trouble. Laments often include a promise to teach the congregation about God's faithfulness. (See, for instance Psalm 51:13.) This psalm fulfills just such a promise.

1 John 3:1-3

The opening verses are a commentary on certain ideas in the first chapter of the Gospel of John. Only those who receive the Christ the Word are children of God (John 1:12-13; 1 John 3:1). Just as the world did not recognize the Word (John 1:11), so it will not recognize the children either (1 John 3:2). Unlike the Gospel, however, the author of 1 John understands the relationship of the children to God to be principally one of moral purity. This sets up the argument in 3:6-8 that the children will not sin and that those who do sin are children of the devil. The idea that Christians would be sinless was not universal in early Christianity but does find expression in the New Testament not only here but in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Matthew 5:1-12

The blessings here begin the Sermon on the Mount and are paralleled in Luke 6: 17, 20-23 at the beginning of the Sermon on the Plain. Both Gospels have gotten their material from a common source of sayings known to scholars simply as "Q." For Matthew, the blessings represent advanced teaching, reserved for the disciples alone, whereas Luke directs them as general instruction to the large crowd that comes to Jesus from Judah, Jerusalem, Tyre and Sidon.

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