Prego Plus: Background Notes

All Saints

The Solemnity of All Saints



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Today's solemnity began in the fifth century as a feast for all known and unknown martyrs, though its focus was later extended to all the saints. Many Christians take opportunity on this day to remember people of inspirational faith and life-giving witness, including those dear to them, believing they are in heaven among the 'unknown' saints.
The Mass readings similarly emphasise the presence of holy men and women in the Church, seeing them as examples of faithful and joy-filled service for us to emulate. In the words of Pope John Paul II, today's feast 'invites us to turn our gaze to the immense multitude of those who have already reached the blessed land, and points us on the path that will lead us to that destination'. (All Saints Day, 2003)

Second Reading 1 John 3: 1–3

The author of this epistle continues to interpret St John's Gospel to his community. He focuses on the love God has for all of us. It is as a result of this love that we can be called God's children.

For Christians one of the consequences of being children of God is that we tend to be counter-cultural in our values: '*the world refuses to acknowledge us*' .There is a tension between the present and the future. We **are** God's children, but the author accepts with great honesty that the future is unclear: '*What we are to be in the future has not been revealed'.*

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This lack of certainty about the future is also expressed by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians: '*Now we are seeing a dim reflection in a mirror; but then we shall be seeing face to face' (1 Cor. 13: 12).*

A main theme of Greek religion of that time was that there was a transformative experience for humans when they were in the presence of a divinity: people became what they were looking at. The author of St John's letter uses this argument, which will have been familiar to his audience: when we see God, we shall be like him.

This is surely an incentive for leading a pure life, and it is a link to today's Gospel: '*Happy are the pure in heart: they shall see God'.*

Gospel Matthew 5: 1–12

The Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount is the first of the five discourses that form a central part of Matthew's Gospel. The beginning of the Sermon – which we know as 'The Beatitudes' –summarises the values of the Kingdom. Matthew here modifies the first, fourth and ninth Beatitudes included in Luke's 'Sermon on the Plain', though the rest are thought to be his own composition.

Jesus sits down to teach

This is a significant detail. When a Jewish Rabbi was teaching officially, he sat down. Equally, when Matthew uses the word 'taught' he uses a past tense, which in Greek means that Jesus's teaching was repeated and habitual. The Sermon on the Mount was not one sermon, but rather it was the essence of all that Jesus taught throughout his ministry.

The Beatitudes

'Beatitude' comes from the Latin *beatus*, meaning blessed. The word 'blessed' used by Matthew himself comes from the Greek *makarios*, which specially describes the gods. Thus there is a godlike joy in the people he is describing. This quality is something they already have, rather than something they hope to achieve in the future. In effect, Jesus is saying that there is great joy in living out the values of the Kingdom; values the world finds difficult to accept and understand.
Matthew was writing for a Jewish-Christian audience, and those in his community lived by edicts and rules of the Jewish Law. The Beatitudes point to an awareness of spiritual need, humility, peaceful and moral living, and compassion as the keys to happiness. Most of all, Matthew's Beatitudes see Christian witness as the core of a happy life.

St Beuno's Outreach