



All Saints' Day (A)

November 1, 2026

[RCL] Revelation 7:9-17; Psalm 34:1-10, 22; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12

Opening Prayer |

Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord: 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; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

Context |

The Book of Revelation, written in the late first century AD, is an intersection of three literary genres: apocalypse, prophecy, and epistle. It echoes the form of other canonical books such as Daniel, the Gospel of John, and Paul's letters; yet it is a distinctively unique work. It is difficult for our modern brains to separate these Biblical literary genres from those more familiar to us in our modern context, yet that distinction is critical for understanding the writing in Revelation. Knowing how to read this book is critical to understanding it.

The ancient Greek word translated as 'apocalypse' meant the pulling back of a veil—a revealing. Apocalypse texts were meant to reveal the deeper truths of cosmic realities, not to warn of a destructive end to the world. And so too, the Biblical concept of apocalypse does not mean Armageddon. Similarly, Biblical prophecies were meant to motivate people to action in their current lives, not to serve as dire warnings of events to come in the far-off future. Thus, the apocalyptic, prophetic letter of Revelation should not be read today as a book of signs that foretell the end of the world. Instead, it should be read through the lens of its original context: as a writing that reveals a great truth about God and what it means to be God's people. When we can see it with those eyes, this book is applicable to our modern-day context as it was to those first-century followers of the God who is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Theological Reflection |

When you dream of Heaven, who do you think will be there? Who do you *hope* will be there? Who do you think will *not* be there? Is there anyone you *hope* will not be there? Is there anyone who is beyond God's capacity to forgive? The first two questions may provide hope and comfort, while the latter three questions may – if honestly considered – feel uncomfortable to even think about.

Today's passage from Chapter 7 is an interlude in the letter of Revelation, interrupting what the reader expects next in the narrative of the seals from the preceding chapters. For the early Christians who were the original audience of Revelation, this interlude (along with a later one in chapters 10 and 11) was intended to form the people of God as they lived into their new callings as Jesus-followers. In our present day—and especially on All Saints' Day—these words are an invitation to contemplate not only what is to come in Heaven, but also how Christians should endeavor to live presently “on earth as it is in Heaven.”

The heavenly multitude gathered around the throne of the Lamb, worshipping God, is an image of hope, particularly to those who grieve. It is a vision that unites the church and the people of God across all time. There is a reason these verses are read at funerals! These words encourage those in the depths of grief to persevere in their faith by giving them the hope of eternity, just as these words once encouraged first-century Christians to persevere through persecution and uncertainty. These verses speak to the greatest hope of Christian salvation—eternal life with our Creator and with those who have been known, loved, and lost in temporal time—won for us by Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. The Christian faith proclaims that the promise of eternal life and the forgiveness of sin is freely offered to all through Jesus.

Thus the author of Revelation depicts a broad and diverse gathered multitude—not a group limited to close loved ones. This image of the throng around the throne invites contemplation on the width and depth of God's forgiveness. Are there people—whether groups or individuals—who are beyond God's forgiveness? And, if we think that about others, then might there be people who think that about us? Are there those who wish that *we* will not be there with them, around the throne of God?

Practicing forgiveness is the antidote to cycles of violence and the perpetuation of evil. Forgiveness does not mean that every action is acceptable—quite the opposite. Forgiveness, as the opposite action to revenge, is an emphatic statement that some actions are so egregious and unacceptable that they should not be repeated. By choosing forgiveness, we choose to stop the cycle of violence.

The lives of saints—those known to the church at large or only to those who loved them—help to draw others nearer to the life of Christ. But remember that the whole heavenly multitude is made up of sinners who were saved by the grace of God through Jesus. They forgave *and* they needed forgiveness. Who are the ones gathered around the throne? As we read in Revelation 7:14: “These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Discussion Questions |

- Who are saints that you admire? What attributes of their lives were near to the life of Christ?
- Salvation is made possible only through God's grace. When have you experienced the wideness of God's mercy?
- Adopting a posture of forgiveness might look like forgiving someone for hurtful words after an apology or not harboring thoughts of revenge in your heart. What are other ways you might start practicing forgiveness in your daily life?

Faith in Practice |

Letter writing can be a cathartic practice, even if the letter is never sent to its intended recipient. Spend some time this week writing letters to loved ones no longer living; ones you need to forgive; ones from whom you need forgiveness. While you are writing, pray for the person and be honest with yourself. Give thanks for their life and for the ways they revealed God to you or strengthened your faith. Send the letters that need to be sent and for others, let the writing be enough.

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