

FIRST IMPRESSIONS FEAST OF ALL SAINTS

Rev. 7: 2-4, 9-14 Psalm 24 I John 3:1-3 Matthew 5:1-12

By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

PRENOTE:

Welcome to the latest email recipients of “First Impressions,” the parishioners and staff of St. Margaret of Antioch Parish in Pear River, N.Y. We just finished a parish retreat there and we thank you for your hospitality.

There is a group of diligent lay Christians who minister to children with physical handicaps. They provide opportunities for summer camp, field trips, classes, periodic worship services and Masses. They have a newsletter which they e-mail to a list of benefactors and people interested in their ministry. It’s in the form of a letter and begins, “Dear Saints.” I squirm a bit whenever I receive that salutation from them. They may be saints; but me? It’s too soon!

But the title “saints” was used in the early church to describe those called and in covenant with God through Christ. The church has an elaborate and careful process to determine whom we officially call “Saints.” Many of these we incorporate into our liturgical calendar. But even as we venerate certain “acknowledged” Saints, let’s not dismiss our own identity and dignity received through, what the Book of Revelation describes as, “the Blood of the Lamb ” – the life, death and resurrection of Christ. His risen life blood flows in our veins and so we can truthfully call each other “saints.” In doing so we would not be claiming anything we have done or deserve for ourselves, but have received through the gift of grace. We have been called to holiness by God and are given the gifts we need to live holy, sainted lives.

If there is one biblical book even regular readers of the Scriptures tend to avoid it is the Book of Revelation. Someone said, “It’s so bizarre! Who can understand those hallucinatory images and strange creatures?” Even today’s reading from Revelation has strange details that could confuse the modern reader’s need for literal exactness.

As a teenager at Mass on this feast I would be stopped dead in my tracks by what seemed an obvious absurdity. How could those wearing robes get them white by washing them “in the Blood of the Lamb?” Wouldn’t that turn them red? I couldn’t

get my mind around that image and figured I'd leave the interpretation to some Bible scholars. I should have reflected on this reading not as a high school student in a physics class, but as a reflective reader in English Literature 101, because the Book of Revelation is apocalyptic literature and has more in common with poetry than science.

Towards the end of the first century Christians were under the severe persecution of Domitian and were tempted to feel abandoned by God. In his poetic style the author tells them – “Quite the contrary.” This vision is a promise of future glory for those who remain faithful to the Lamb. Glory isn't only a future reward, but even now we share in God's holiness through Jesus Christ. “Dear Saints” might well be the perfect appellation for those of us gathered in worship today; so saints we are, because we are held “dear” by our God. Our baptismal robes are made white by the life force of Jesus, his blood, at work in our lives.

I like this grammar school story. A religion teacher asked her second-grade class, “What's a saint?” A little girl, probably remembering the stained glass images in her parish church, responded, “Saints are the people the light shines through.” The big or “public lights” are up there in the church windows. Their light shines through in a rainbow of colors. Their biographies tell us that no two were the same. You can say: there are no identical twins in God's house. Each shone their unique light in one or many dark places in the world.

Because their light has been so brilliant, we raise them up for all to see so that the rest of us can be enlightened and have hope. If God could shine such light through Mary, Joseph, Dominic, Catherine of Siena, Francis and Clare, then God can do that even in us! Keep us: strong in times of trials and doubts; courageous when challenged; compassionate to the broken; wise for those who are searching; outspoken when others hold a fearful silence; anonymous in performing loving deeds; persevering when struggles will not just evaporate; defending justice when the world ignores or presses down those on the margins; gentle and strong in the face of what opposes the gospel.

Where did I get that list of saintly virtues? I grant that it is incomplete, but I came up with it when I reflected on the lives of my favorite Saints – like the ones I named above. They are the “Big S” – Saints. But I also reflected on the “little s”

saints I have known and loved and frequently felt in awe of. They remind me what is possible in my small, particular, daily life. I am sure that you have your favorites and are able to draw up your own list of the virtues that make a saint. When you make your own list you will find it parallels what Jesus enumerated in today's gospel – the Beatitudes.

The Beatitudes aren't a list of commandments we have to live by if we want to follow Jesus. Instead, they show how we can live when the source of our life is Jesus. Because of him we are "Blessed," our lives reflect a profound change in us, the result of his grace, which enables us to be: poor in spirit, gentle, merciful, peacemakers, etc.

In our second reading, John puts it another way "... we are God's children now." This feast is about Now; about our union with one another and the great "cloud of witnesses" who have preceded us. Today's feast reminds us of those who are now gazing on God's brilliance and that we are in communion with them through our prayers and memory. And, because of their lives, we can have hope for our own!

My four-year old grandniece gave me a drawing she made of me. "Here Uncle Jude, this is for you." The simple pencil-stick work of art made me look good, with a round warm face, wide-open eyes, a huge smile, listening ears and outstretched arms. (She even filled in my bald spots!) A psychologist would say, "That's a drawing of a healthy and secure child." I would add that my little niece has a touching and wonderful view of who I am to her right now. I would also say, she's drawing me as God sees me – graced – the fruit of God's handiwork.

The next time I get that "Dear Saints" e-mail, instead of squirming, I'm going to say, "Right On!" – because God's grace is already at work in me and God isn't going to give up on me until I get to my proper home. There, someday, I'm going to meet all the stained glass Saints in the flesh. I'm also going to meet all the others – no-less-holy, saints, "the great multitude which no one can count." We are already the saints of God, not because we have earned a great reward or have gone through life unblemished by sin, but because of the mercy of God manifested in Jesus. "Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne and from the Lamb." When Paul addressed the Christians as the saints in his epistles, he was not only talking about their future glory, but their present status.

FAITH BOOK

Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run. "Faith Book" is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.

From today's reading from Revelation:

After this I had a vision of a great multitude,
which no one could count, from every nation, race, people and tongue.
They stood before the throne and before the Lamb,
wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands.

Reflection:

A religion teacher asked her second-grade class, "What's a saint?" A little girl, probably remembering the stained glass images in her parish church, responded, "Saints are the people the light shines through."

So we ask ourselves:

Who are my favorite saints and how do they shine the light of Jesus into my life?
How does my life illumine the dark for others?

JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD

"See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God." (1 John 3:1)

The realization that we are all "children of God", beloved sons and daughters of a loving Father, is at the heart of Social Concerns Ministries and of what our Church calls "preferential option for the poor". This does not mean that the poor are necessarily more loveable. It *does* mean that when we learn that some beloved daughters and sons are living lives of desperate poverty or injustice, we must turn toward them and *lean* in their direction. We must give up some of what we *want* to begin to give these "sons" and "daughters" what they *need*. This is no different than any family does if one of its members is sick. The whole family turns its attention and energy to care for the one who is in need. ***God's family should do no less.***

In the fall of 1993, the US Catholic Bishops published a document called

“Communities of Salt and Light. In it they state: “Our parish communities are measured by how they serve “the least of these” in our parish and beyond its boundaries-the hungry, the homeless, the sick, those in prison, the stranger. A parish cannot really proclaim the gospel if its message is not reflected in its own community life.” <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/saltandlight.shtml>

Did you know?

- Sacred Heart’s ***Social Concerns Committee*** always welcomes observers or new members. Some of the many ways Sacred Heart “leans” toward those in need are:
- ***MICAH Ministries*** - Moore Square Meals, Wake Interfaith Hospitality Network, Shelter Meals.
- ***Prison Ministry*** – conducts Catholic prayer services for incarcerated women in prison; also accompanies women to Sunday Eucharist at Sacred Heart.
- ***Global Outreach*** – fair trade products and education made available monthly after Masses; delegations from Sacred Heart to sister parish/community in Nicaragua
- ***Parish Door Ministry*** – emergency financial assistance for the poor; help with rent, utilities, etc.
- ***Sidewalk Ministry***- Trained parishioners who provide a “parish face” to the poor on weekends, with compassion, information and food resources when necessary.
- ***Support Circle Ministry*** – groups of parishioners who commit to work with homeless individuals and families in a covenanted agreement, providing spiritual, educational and “material” support for a specific length of time.

What can I do?

- Consider joining Sacred Heart’s Social Concerns Committee, or one of our many parish outreach ministries. For information call: 865-8966.

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, N. C.)

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I post in this space several inmates’ names and addresses. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them

know we have not forgotten them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty." If the inmate responds you might consider becoming pen pals.

Please write to:

Jim E. Haselden #0561943 (On death row since 9/6/01)
James H. Watts #0428143 (7/19/01)
Bryan C. Bell #0592461 (8/24/01)

Cental Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, N.C. 27606

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Two new CDs Available: **"FIRST IMPRESSIONS PREACHING REFLECTIONS"** **"Liturgical year A,"** which begins in Advent and contains **three** reflections for almost all the Sundays and major feasts for the year. It also has book reviews and additional essays related to preaching.

"Liturgical years, A, B and C," reflections on the three-year cycle.

If you are a preacher, lead a Lectionary-based scripture group, or are a member of a liturgical team, these CDs will be helpful in your preparation process. Individual worshipers report they also use these reflections as they prepare for Sunday liturgy.

You can order the CDs by going to our webpage: www.preacherexchange.com and clicking on the "First Impressions" CDs link on the left.

2. I get notes from people responding to these reflections. Sometimes they tell how they use "First Impressions" in their ministry and for personal use. Others respond to the reflections, make suggestions and additions. I think our readers would benefit from these additional thoughts. If you drop me a BRIEF note, I will be happy to add your thoughts and reflections to my own. (Judeop@Juno.com)

3. Our webpage: <http://www.preacherexchange.com>

Where you will find "Preachers' Exchange," which includes "First Impressions" and "Homilias Dominicales," as well as articles, book reviews and quotes pertinent to preaching.

4. "Homilias Dominicales"-- these Spanish reflections are written by three friars of the Southern Dominican Province, Jose David Padilla, OP, Wilmo Candanedo, OP and two Dominican sisters, Regina Mc Carthy, OP and Doris Regan, OP. Like "First Impressions", "Homilias Dominicales" are a preacher's early reflections on the upcoming Sunday readings and liturgy. So, if you or a friend would like to receive "Homilias Dominicales" drop a note to John Boll, O.P. at: Jboll@opsouth.org or jboll@preacherexchange.org

5. "First Impressions" is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A. If you would like "First Impressions" sent weekly to a friend, send a note to John Boll at the above Email address.

DONATIONS

If you would like to support this ministry, please send tax deductible contributions to Jude Siciliano, O.P., whose address is listed below. Make checks to: Dominican Friars of Raleigh. Or, go to our webpage to make an online donation: <http://www.preacherexchange.com>

Thank you.

Blessings on your preaching,

Jude Siciliano, O.P., Promoter of Preaching, Southern Dominican Province, USA

P.O. Box 12927, Raleigh, N.C. 27605, (919) 833-1893, Email: judeop@juno.com