

Call To Worship

Come from north and south, east and west,
we come to worship God!

Come and join the great crowd from every nation, tribe, language and way of life;
we come to worship God!

Come and affirm that 'salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb';
we come to worship God!

Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour
and power and might be to our God
forever and ever, Amen!

Prayers of Approach, Confession, and Grace

We come and offer our praise and thanks to You, Most High,
as Your children, called, redeemed, and made holy,
marvelling at Your loving kindness.

We come and offer our praise and thanks to You, Lord Jesus,
longing for what will be revealed,
yearning to live as Your saints - even as we battle with our human frailty.
We look forward to when You will be fully revealed to us and we become like You.

We come and offer our praise and thanks to You, Most Holy Spirit,
knowing you inspire and purify us as we live out our discipleship.
You lead us, as the saints of old,
helping us make sense of our calling in this world
and making us ever hopeful for the next.

Forgive us, Eternal Trinity,
when we turn to sin instead of sanctity,
when we find happiness in the transitory instead of the everlasting,
when seek to be invisible fading into our world with grace that is cheap,
instead of sharing Your costly grace which demands a response and a difference.

Forgive us and give us time to change!
Forgive us and give us time to turn around!
Forgive us and call us again to be Your saints! Amen.

Dear friends,
see what grace has been lavished upon us,
we are now made children of God, but long for what is to be revealed.
Accept the forgiveness God offers, but turn your lives around to live as Jesus did,
showing holiness in the high street, sanctity in the suburbs, love to the lost,
and rest to the weary. Amen.

Introduction to the Readings

In our first reading from Revelation, we are given a vision of heaven where the redeemed from every nation, race, way of life and tongue join to sing in praise of God. These are those who have endured and kept the faith despite great tribulation. The Psalmist encourages the saints to sing God's praise and to take refuge in God's love where we will find happiness and security. In our Epistle we hear of our existing status as being children of God with all the blessing and responsibility that goes with it whilst in our Gospel reading Jesus tells us what truly leads to a happy and fulfilled life as God's people enjoining counter cultural values. So, we pray for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as we listen again for God's word.

Prayer for Illumination

We seek you, O Most High, and You answer us,
You deliver us from our fears.
Open our hearts and minds, Lord Jesus,
that as we listen for You in our readings,
we taste and see that You are good.
Happy are we, Most Holy Spirit,
who take refuge in You
as we listen, understand, and obey. Amen.

All Age Activity

Show some pictures of saints – from stained glass, photographs of more recently declared ones, art of Biblical figures. Ask what makes someone a saint. After some answers say that in order to be a saint there are various current conditions:

- being dead
- having lived an exemplary life (then you're declared a Servant of God)
- having one miracle attributed to you (then you're declared a blessed)
- having a second miracle attributed to you (then you can be declared a saint)

Oh, and the miracles must happen after you've died! People ask you to intercede for them with God, if God answer through a miracle it's a sign that the person you've asked is indeed in heaven.

In the earliest Church those who were killed for their faith were automatically recognised as saints. As time passed, however, and in the Orthodox Churches now, one is acclaimed a saint if it is felt you lived a holy life. Biblical figures like Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and the disciples are all seen as saints – as, strangely is the Archangel Michael. The current rules came in to introduce a certain logic and order to the process.

In churches like ours we recognise the holy example of those who have gone before us but also recognise that, in the Bible, “saints” was a type of shorthand for Christians. Paul wrote letters to churches calling them saints and then, at times, explaining how unholy they were!

If you were to live as a saint, what would you think that involved for you?

Readings

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

Notes on the Readings

Revelation 7:9-17

David Frankfurter in the Jewish Annotated New Testament (JANT) notes the book is both a literary disclosure of heavenly secrets (*apocalypse*) and an oral communication of divine intentions (prophecy). It has been dated to various points in the second half of the First Century due to the author's interest in the Emperor Nero (cf Chapter 13). The book as a whole mixes vision and letter, song and list, oracle and narrative. It's not an easy book! Frankfurter thinks it's a composition from one author writing in different styles – just as many ancient documents were. In vv13-17 we have the idea of purification through martyrdom – an idea also seen in Daniel 11:35. Gentiles who were sanctified like this became like priests, servants before the heavenly throne.

Adela Yarbro Collins The 21st Century Jerome (J21) notes modern scholarship sees one writer at work wishing to stress the unity of early Christian traditions with Jewish traditions. The work was addressed to the seven churches explicitly mentioned in chapters 2 and 3 which, apart from Thyatira, were important urban centres in the Roman Empire. Our passage is the second vision of salvation with a great unnumberable multitude from all the nations who are saved – the saints. The first vision (7: 1- 8) is a smaller number from Israel, the second from all the nations. They carry palm branches as a sign of victory and sing of salvation. The Hebrew word for salvation, which the writer would have known despite using Greek, has connotations of welfare, deliverance, salvation and victory. The dialogue makes clear these are those who came through

persecution and tribulation; their cleansing from being soiled to being holy is through Jesus' sacrificial death. The allusion is to repentance, conversion, baptism which, together, both indicate and give effect to a person's transformation. Perseverance might mean death, but the passage does not say this is the way for all Christians. The last verses of the passage show the emotional and physical healing that comes from salvation and living in God's presence.

Themes to explore

The passage is set for All Saints Day as it gives a vision of the redeemed from every nation, culture, and language standing in praise of God. These are those who have been saved – in this context those who have held fast despite persecution. The saints experience the wholeness of salvation which is promised to all who follow Jesus.

Psalms 34:1-10, 22

The Jewish Study Bible (JSB) notes this is an acrostic poem in Hebrew with each verse starting with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order (with just one letter missing). There are references to bodily senses and functions – speaking through the mouth, faces being radiant, and tasting and seeing the Lord is good. v4 “O magnify the Lord with me...” is used in Synagogue worship when the Torah Scroll, seen as representing God, is removed from the Ark.

Konrad Schaefer (J21) notes the Psalm is in two parts, the portion we have, mainly, today is praise and thanksgiving and then we have one verse of the second part which is a wisdom style reflection.

Themes to explore

The Psalm is chosen to reflect the Revelation reading to show the dependence that saints have on the Lord.

1 John 3:1-3

Michelle Murray (JANT) This is one of three letters attributed to “John” yet the author is not named in any of them. Nor is there any internal claim the writer is the same as the writer of John's Gospel, but the title implies there is a relationship between the other “Johannine” letters and the Gospel due to a shared vocabulary and themes but there are differences in style. This leads scholars to think there was a “school” or community of writers with similar theological approaches who wrote these works. Scholars think 1 John was written after the Gospel in the first few years of the Second Century. In contrast to the Gospel there's no polemic against “the Jews”. In today's passage the writer assures readers of their identity as children of God and their becoming like Christ in the resurrection. The imagery of being God's children in Deuteronomy 14 and in other Jewish writing is used to convey the special, intimate, nature of the relationship between God

and the Jews – and how this status placed moral and behavioural obligations on the Jewish people.

Francis J Moloney (J21) notes that the status of believers as children of God is not the result of their own achievements; they are recipients of God's love. The rejection of the believers by the world is a sign of the world's rejection of God the Father and Jesus. Moloney sees the writer moving from the reliance on Christ's return at the end with an emphasis on what we are now – children of God – yet what we will become is yet to be revealed. It's not just glory in the hereafter but now we have the status, dignity, and responsibilities noted above. We have God's gifts now even as we yearn for the sight of God at the completion of all things.

Themes to Explore

The identity that the writer gives to his readers as "children of God" draws on the OT and conveys the special, intimate, relationship believers have with God. Yet this relationship has obligations too – just as it does for the Jewish people so it does for us. Neither the Jews, nor us, earned our place as God's children. This is a status conveyed by God's loving kindness without regard to our own goodness or worth. We already have the status of God's children but the writer reminds us we don't yet know what we will be – perhaps the vision of sainthood in Revelation?

St Matthew 5:1-12

Aaron M Gale (JANT) notes "Beatitude" comes from the Latin "beatus" and Greek "Makarios" meaning "blessed" or "fortunate". In the Greek translation of the OT Makarios occurs 68 times as a translation of the Hebrew word "ashrei" meaning "happy." The beatitudes are rooted in the OT. "Blessed are the poor in spirit" and "blessed are those who mourn" might be based on Isaiah 61: 1 – 3. "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth" is a quotation of Psalm 31:11 though the Psalm speaks of the "Land" meaning the Land of Israel whereas the NT has "earth" which might separate Jesus from any special concern for the Land of Israel given his universal message. The words about hunger and thirst resonate with Ps Psalm 107: 5-6, 9, Psalm 22:26, and Proverbs 14:21. The pure, or clean, in heart can be seen in Psalm 24: 3-6, and Psalm 73:1.

Ian Boxall (J21) notes that this is the most famous of Jesus' sermons and gives a pattern for discipleship. He notes it's been known as the Sermon on the Mount since, at least, St Augustine and contains the Beatitudes, the Our Father, and the Golden Rule. Matthew presents Jesus as the authoritative interpreter of the Mosaic Law. The Early Church understood the Beatitudes to be a call to perfection addressed to every Christian. Jesus sets out this radical ideal to which we should all aspire – figures like Francis of Assisi, Leo Tolstoy, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Dorothy Day (we might add Mother Theresa and Desmond Tutu) have tried to live their lives in harmony with this ethic. He notes they have OT antecedents. The *poor in spirit* might refer to the destitute who are "crushed in spirit" or the poor who are aware of their total dependence on God. Using Isaiah 61: 2-3

Boxall thinks those who mourn are not the bereaved but those who mourn over their current state of oppression who are promised joy when Zion is restored.

Stephen Westerholm (NIB) sees the “poor in spirit” as those who in their need desperately cry to God for help (does this sanitize the idea of the poor being blessed?), sees the meek as “those who want no part in the world's pursuit of power but become like children and serve others.” “Misfits and persecuted on earth, the poor in spirit, mourners, and meek who follow Jesus will be rewarded with a part in the kingdom of heaven.”

Hauerwas notes the Sermon is unintelligible if separated out from the context of Matthew's Gospel – which of course is what happens in our Lectionary snippets. If we separate out the message from the messenger we are in danger of making the sermon a moral law impossible to follow. Hauerwas notes that if we see this as a list of moral exemplars which can't be followed literally we take the power from the sermon – and from its application to our own lives. It might be fine, some argue, to see this as a personal morality but it can't be applied to our civic life. Yet, as Hauerwas points out, there's no such distinction in the Gospel itself. Another way of reading the sermon is to make us despair that we could ever reach such moral heights and then turn to God for forgiveness. Some, Protestants in particular, read the Sermon as a contrast between a gospel of forgiveness contrasted with Judaism's emphasis on law. (And by extension they try to cast Catholicism as a church based on law not grace). Hauerwas notes that the problem with these interpretations is they forget the Church is not meant to be at home in the world; salvation is not be construed as satisfying God's anger which allows “the saved” avoid the radical departure which is Jesus' call to discipleship. Those who believe their sins are forgiven are relieved from living distinctly or, from a more liberal perspective, those who believe the world has been saved through Christ's grace see no need to live in a different way from the world. Bonhoeffer called these theologies “cheap grace”. The Beatitudes, and the Sermon, become an ethic that is disconnected from salvation. Instead Hauerwas reminds us the Sermon is delivered by the Messiah, the Son of God who is making all things new. It's the reality of the new age, the Kingdom, made possible in time. We can't then, separate out the message from the messenger. He holds the sayings in the sermon help us interpret Jesus' life which life is necessary for us to understand the Sermon. Hauerwas sees the sermon not as an ethic but as a call to constitute a new people, the Church. It's not a list of requirements but a description of those gathered around Jesus – and to be saved is to be gathered. This is a call to be visible – yet often the Church seeks invisibility by blending with the surrounding culture – which Hauerwas thinks we've done ever since Christianity became the state religion of the Empire. Before Constantine it took a lot of courage to be a Christian; afterwards it took a lot of courage not to be.

Themes to explore

Luther saw the beatitudes as descriptions of what a faith filled life looks like rather than a set of demands which we'd follow to gain God's favour. He noted they flip the order of the world around and, thinking of the description of those who hunger and thirst for

righteousness commented that such cannot be earned but are free gifts of God – though might Jesus have been referring more to justice than holiness here? Calvin saw them as an encapsulation of the Christian life, giving comfort in adversity – Calvin knew a thing or two about adversity as the divides of the Reformation became more acute. Like Luther he saw the inversion of the world's values in them and, like Luther, saw the Beatitudes as signs of God's work in the elect. He urged people to see them as promises of the future "they will be...". Peacemakers in this telling would have referred to local disputes as none of Jesus' followers would have had any significant influence; returning to that idea might be transformative in our churches and communities.

Commentaries used

Matthew, Stanley Hauerwas, SCM Press 2006

The Jerome Biblical Commentary for the 21st Century (T & T Clark, 2022)

The Jewish Annotated New Testament (OUP, 2011)

The Jewish Study Bible (Jewish Publication Society/OUP, 2014)

The New Interpreter's One Volume Commentary (Abingdon, 2010)

Affirmation of Faith

Our culture tells us of blessed billionaires but Jesus says:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Our culture distracts us from inequality, injustice, racism and poverty but Jesus says:

"Blessed are those who mourn for how things are, for they will be comforted."

Our culture valorises the strong and powerful, but Jesus says:

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."

Our culture tells us that things are complex, that little can really change, but Jesus says:

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

Our culture screams for ever more draconian responses to crime and countries we don't like, but Jesus says:

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy."

Our culture titillates, and glamorises the young and the attractive, seeking to sell pleasure, but Jesus says:

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

Our culture is addicted to war, but Jesus says:

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

Our culture despises migrants who flee war and want, poverty and persecution, but Jesus says:

**“Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”**

Our culture demands that we are liked
and seek validation on social media but Jesus says:

**“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you...on my account.
Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.”**

And so, with the great multitude that no one can count,
from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,
who stand before the throne of God, we cry out in loud voice, saying,
"Salvation belongs to our God!"

Intercessions

O Most High,
we pray for those from every nation, language, faith, and way of life,
who suffer persecution for what they believe, or how they love, or who they are,
that our world may become more tolerant,
that torturer and tyrant may be brought to trial,
and that all may live freely.

We pray too for those who seek to change the world as it is,
into what it could be.

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

Risen Lord Jesus,
we pray for the Church,
the community of people You gather to Yourself.
Help us to be visible, to stand out from our culture,
by love not loathing,
service, not status,
weakness not wealth,
beatitude not blight,
that Your loving kindness might shine from our lives
showing the salvation that comes from God.

We pray too for those who seek to change the Church as it is, into what it could be.

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

Eternal Spirit,
we pray for ourselves and those we love;
help us to live the beatitudes,

to serve those around us,
and to hold in our hearts those in need and for whom we now pray

pause

And we pray for our own needs and dreams

pause

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

Hear our prayers, O Trinity of Love,
as we pray as Jesus taught saying....Our Father

Offertory

The Church has always had a tension between needing to be on the margins and needing resources to be secure in its work. Those who went to the edges of society to seek sanctity soon found that their communities became wealthy. In unstable ages the Church's wealth gave it independence – but at great cost. In our tradition we don't rely on the state or much inherited wealth and rely on the generosity of our people and our entrepreneurial skills to raise the funds we need to both glorify God and serve God in the world. God, in turn, blesses us with gifts of grace which enable us to live as people seeking to embody the beatitudes. So we give thanks for all that is given in this place – gifts of time and love, gifts of skill and care and, of course, gifts of money given in the plate or direct to the bank. Let's pray:

God of every good gift,
we thank you for all that You give this congregation,
and ask that you bless all of our gifts,
that we may be sources of blessing to others. Amen.

Holy Communion

We praise you, O Most High, we acclaim you as Lord;
all creation worships you, the everlasting Creator.
To you all angels, all the powers of heaven,
the cherubim and seraphim, sing in endless praise:

When the Saints Sanctus

Nick Fawcett © 2008 Kevin Mayhew Ltd (to the tune of When the Saints Come Marching In)

O holy Lord, O holy Lord, O holy Lord of pow'r and might,
Your glory fills the earth and heavens, O holy Lord of pow'r and might.

Hosanna, Lord, hosanna Lord, we sing hosanna, Lord to You,
we sing hosanna in the highest, we sing hosanna, Lord, to You.

Bless'd be the One, bless'd be the One, who in the Lord's name comes to save,
bless'd be the One who comes among us, who in the Lord's name comes to save.

Hosanna, Lord, hosanna, Lord, we sing hosanna, Lord to You.
We sing hosanna in the highest, we sing hosanna, Lord, to You.

The glorious company of apostles praise You.
The noble fellowship of prophets praise You.
The white-robed army of martyrs praise You.
Throughout the world the holy Church acclaims You:
Eternal Majesty unbounded, with Your true and only Son, worthy of all praise,
and the Holy Spirit, our advocate and guide.

You, O Christ, are the king of glory, the eternal Son of the Most High.
When you took our flesh to set us free you humbly chose Mary's womb.
You overcame the sting of death and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

Before You were given over to death,
You shared in the simplicity of a meal with Your friends,
and, during that meal, You said the ancient blessing over bread,
broke the bread, and gave it to Your friends, saying

"take this all of you, and eat it, for this is my body broken for you.
Do this in memory of me."

In the same way, after supper, You took the cup filled with wine,
said the ancient blessing, and, giving the cup to Your friends said:

"Take this all of you, and drink from it, for this is the cup of my blood,
the blood of the new and everlasting promise of God,
shed for you and for many so that sins may be forgiven.
Drink this and remember me."

Let us remember Jesus as we proclaim the central mystery of our faith:

Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!

You, O Christ, are seated at the right hand of the Most High in glory.
We believe that You will come to be our judge.
So come then, Lord, and help your people, bought with the price of Your own blood,
and bring us with Your saints to glory everlasting.

As we wait for Jesus to come again, we pray, O Holy Spirit,
that You will come upon these gifts of bread and wine,
that they may be for us the communion with the body and blood of Christ,
and that we may be, for You, Christ's hands and feet, love and presence, in the world.

For through You, with Christ, all glory and honour,
belongs to the Most High, forever and ever, Amen.

Holy things for a holy people.

Only one is holy, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are made holy in him.

The bread of heaven in Christ Jesus. The cup of salvation in Christ Jesus.

*Communion Prayer based, in part,
on the English Language Liturgical Consultation's translation
of the Te Deum*

Post Communion Prayer

Day by day we bless you, we bless You, O Most High;
we praise your name for ever.

As You have fed us at this table today, Lord Jesus,
keep us from all sin.

Holy Spirit, show us Your love and mercy,
for we have put our trust in You.

In You, O Trinity of Love, is our hope:

**let us never be put to shame as we seek to love and serve
You in our world. Amen.**

based on an English Language Liturgical Consultation text

Blessing

May the One who is praised by all Creation,
the One who calls a great multitude from every race and nation,
the One who inspires all to follow and change,
give you the grace to praise, to follow and to change
and the blessing of Almighty God,

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit **or** Eternal Majesty, Enfleshed Word, Enlivening Spirit
be with you, all whom you love, and all whom you struggle to love
now and always, Amen

Hymn Suggestions

	RS	CH4	StF	MP
<i>All Saints General</i>				
Crown Him With Many Crowns	262	459	347	109
For All The Saints	658	740	745	148
Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken	560	738	748	173
The Church's One Foundation	566	739	690	640
Glory To You O God For All Your Saints In Light		741		
Rejoice in God's Saints, Today and All Days		742		
Hark How the Adoring Host Above (set it to Lyngham – O For A 1000 Tongues)		744		
For All The Saints Who Showed Your Love			746	
<i>Revelation</i>				
Ye Servants of God, Your Master Proclaim	293	130	340	784
All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name		457	342	13
Give Me The Wings of Faith To Rise	664		747	
Be Still My Soul		691		
Love Divine All Loves Excelling	663	519	503	449
Jesus Shall Reign where'er the Sun	269	470	328	379
Ye Holy Angels Bright	125	179	69	783
<i>Psalms 34</i>				
Through All the Changing Scenes of Life	685		638	702
When Morning Gilds the Sky	292		368	756
<i>I John</i>				
What Wondrous Love Is This		395		
Blessed Assurance		561	548	59
How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds	277	461	322	251
<i>Matthew</i>				
Blest are the pure in heart			244	
Make Me A Channel of Your Peace	629	528	707	456
The Day of Resurrection	246	413	311	
Gather us In		623		
Do Not Be Afraid	591	191		115

RS – Rejoice & Sing | CH4 – Church Hymnary 4 | StF – Singing the Faith | MP – Mission Praise