
All Saints

Sometimes we forget that we are a part of something bigger than ourselves. With this, the image of a “great multitude” remains a powerful and relevant reminder of our call to community and solidarity. The book of Revelation describes a vision of such a multitude, one gathered “from every nation, race, people, and tongue” that was so vast it could not even be counted. And what is the purpose of this multitude? To proclaim the salvation that comes from the Lord. This multitude comprises the company of the saints, and it is that company that we celebrate today, on the feast of All Saints.

It is one thing to celebrate a saint here, and a saint there, throughout the liturgical year. From time to time, we remember saints from the Bible, like John the Baptist, the evangelists who wrote the gospels, the apostles, and various early disciples. And now and then we remember saints from the history of the church—some who founded religious orders, some who experienced radical conversions, some who performed miracles, and some who were persecuted and killed. *All* of these saints, however, lived lives worth remembering.

If you were to look at any generic list of saints in an internet browser, you would be amazed at the results. Whether arranged alphabetically or chronologically, the list just goes on and on. Scrolling down and down and down, it is clear that the church indeed enjoys a “great multitude” of saints whose lives we wish to remember. Just like the vision in the book of Revelation, however, we may ask: What is the purpose of this multitude? *To proclaim the salvation that comes from the Lord.* All of those saints—from Abakuh and Abamun to Zosimas of Palestine and Zygmunt Gorzowski—proclaim the salvation that comes from our Lord. Their lives provide witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

As Catholics, we celebrate life. Life is a good and beautiful thing. In addition to its goodness and beauty, however, life is *significant*. Think of your own life, for instance. When you piece together the story of your life—whether you are eight or eighty—there is *a lot* of material there. No life is inconsequential, and every life is invaluable. With this in mind, then, let us consider the enormity of the holy lives of *all* the saints, the great multitude in John’s apocalyptic vision, with each of those lives proclaiming the salvation of the Lord. It is almost too staggering a concept to fathom.

As the psalmist proclaims, this “is the people that longs to see” the Lord’s face. Or, as Jesus proclaims in the Sermon on the Mount, these are those who are “poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.” These “are the clean of heart, for they will see God.” And these are “they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.”

There comes a time when, as a church, we must step back and consider *all* the saints and what they mean for us today. The multitude of the saints are not just our past; they are our future. They are not just a series of vignettes from church history; they are the community in which we hope to be a part. They provide not just a calendar of random days on which we remember this or that name; they remind us that all our days are opportunities to proclaim the salvation of the Lord.

As we hear in the First Letter of John, “what we shall be has not yet been revealed.” But we do have a glimpse of what we shall be in that vision of a “great multitude.” We will survive times of great distress, as the text insists. And then, as a community of believers, we shall gather with all the company of heaven and rejoice in the greatest celebration of life that has ever been. The stories of our lives, too, will be told as they really are—as proclaiming the salvation of the Lord!