

All Saints – B Cycle November 1, 2015

INTRODUCTION: *Rev. 7,2-4.9-14; 1 John 3,1-3; Mt. 5,1-12a*

In its four and a half billion years our planet has seen an overwhelming number of catastrophes. Somehow, under God's creative hand, planet earth continues to survive and even thrive. We have however, through our brilliance, discovered ways to annihilate all of creation if we are not wise and prudent. In considering some of the catastrophes the world may yet experience, The Book of Revelation, asks a critical question: "who can survive?"

Today's first reading is the answer to that question. Those who survive are too many to count. In giving us the number 144,000, we are dealing with a symbolic number. It is the number that represents completion. 12 months brings our year to completion. 12 is the number of all of the tribes of Israel. There were 12 apostles. 12 x 12 x 1000 symbolized the completed number of all God's people, none would be left out. People from every race, every land and every language are among those who will survive, and as I said, they are too many to be counted. The key to survival is to follow Christ faithfully and in doing so we will share in Christ's victory over death and enjoy the blessing of eternal happiness forever.

HOMILY: Today's feast of All Saints began around the time that Constantine became converted to Christ – the early fourth century. In those days, there was no formal process for declaring a person a saint. It was just a matter of the Christian community remembering and commemorating a holy person as one who is surely in heaven after they passed away. Those who were martyrs, who gave their life for Christ, were the first to be honored and recognized as saints. And that's how this feast began; its intent was to honor all the martyrs. As time went on, those who lived lives of outstanding virtue were recognized as models of Christian holiness and were honored as such. The Christian Community, often with the approval or leadership of the bishop, continued to give such recognition of holiness to individuals. It wasn't until the year 973 when the first papal canonization occurred. The lengthy process now required to prove extraordinary sanctity took form in the last 500 years.

I could mention many, many holy people whom the Church honors such as our Blessed Mother, St. Boniface, St. Patrick, St. Augustine, St. Jerome, St. Lawrence, St. Thomas More (a man for all seasons), St. Francis of Assisi, St. Anthony, St. Teresa, St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Francis Xavier, etc. You might be interested in knowing some of the new names that have been added to this list in recent years. Pope John Paul added 110 new names, mostly people we've never heard of although we may have heard of St. Maximilian Kolbe, St. Rose Philippine Duchesne, and St. Padre Pio. Benedict XVI added 45 new saints including two people who lived in the New York territory: St. Kateri Tekakwitha, St. Marianne Cope who eventually dedicated herself to serving those who had leprosy in Hawaii; his list also includes St. Damien who lived with and worked with the lepers, Jeanne Jugan who started the Little Sisters of the Poor, St. Andre Bessette of Montreal Canada and St. Hildegard of Bingen. Pope Francis started off canonizing a group of 812 Italian martyrs who refused to convert from Christianity to Islam after the Muslims took over their town in 1480. Francis also canonized 26 other individuals including Pope John XXIII, Pope John Paul II, Junipero Serra, and most recently on Oct 18, Louis and Zelig Martin (the parents of St. Therese – aka the Little Flower whose statue we have).

Why so many saints? Do they need to be honored? St. Bernard says our devotion does not add the slightest thing to what is theirs. They have no need of honor from us. Clearly, if we venerate their memory, it serves us, not them. Their lives assure us that holiness is possible, they teach us by their lives and their writing how to serve God, and they can intercede for us when we need God's help. I can never understand who people argue against praying to the saints. They are the

very same people who, I am sure, ask their friends to pray for them when they are desperate. Why not ask God's friends to pray for you.

Today's feast honors not only the famous individuals who have served God in a heroic way, but it also honors millions of others who have tried to live a good and holy life, including those who have fallen down along the way, but who have gotten up and kept on going. St. Paul so often in his letters refers to the people he was writing to, the people he was serving or had served as saints. The word saint means holy, and if we do the best we can to love and serve God – that makes us a saint even here on earth. The saints that we officially call "saint" are many, but the rest of us are in that big crowd of people we heard about in the first reading, a multitude which no one could number. That gives me great confidence and hope. So, happy feast day, everyone. Amen.

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time– B Cycle November 9, 2015

INTRODUCTION: *[I Kings 17,10-16; Hebrews 9,24-28; Mark 12,38-44]*

Our first reading will make more sense if we know that the events described in the reading happened during a severe famine. We have to marvel at the faith of the widow in our first reading, a faith that is reflected in the offering of another poor widow in the gospel.

HOMILY:

It is required by the bishop that once a year pastors give a financial report to the parish and I thought, because of today's gospel, this would be a good time to do so. Our fiscal year ends on June 30, so these two reports (one for the parish and one for the school) tell us what was budgeted from July 1, 2014, to June 30, 2015 (first column), what were our actual income and expenses for that period of time (second column) and our budget for the current year: July 1, 2015, to June 30, 2016 (third column). If you look at the yellow paper, center column, where you find the actual figures for last year, you will see the parish did well: \$ 46,852 ahead for the fiscal year 2014/2015. Sunday contributions (line item #1) were pretty much what we expected, (for which I thank all of you). But besides Sunday contributions, what really put us over the top were bequests (line # 4) and special gifts (line # 8). Expenses were held pretty much in line, except for salaries (line # 18), which increased due to the unexpected loss of Fr. Lammeier who helped us a lot, both financially and in other ways. Another expense was a part time maintenance person we needed to catch up on some of the work we were getting behind on. A third item that went beyond our expectations was Capital Improvements (item # 36) which involved replacing a lot of deteriorating walkways and getting a good used piano which was offered to us at too good of a deal to pass up. So much for the last fiscal year which is all ancient history now. By the way, I am not going to mention all the line items. I'm just mentioning a few that might jump out at you. As to our current year, we are running in the red (only the budgeted figures for our current year are on that sheet in the third column). For the current year, our Sunday collections are \$9000 less that what our budget calls for and bequests and special gifts are \$ 85,000 less that what we budgeted. That's not happy news. If anyone has been watching, they may have observed that our attendance has been dropping off, which I can only attribute to the fact that our congregation is aging. This, of course, is going to impact our revenue. We are in the process of reaching out to new homeowners in Northside and inviting them to come to St. Boniface.

Now as regards the school, the finance report is printed on the light grey paper. We ended the last fiscal year in the black. Again, gifts and bequests helped put us over the top. Salaries and benefits are our biggest expense, of course. You might be confused by item # 24 where we budgeted a large amount for maintenance. That was because we needed a new roof over the gym, but we were able to pay for it in the previous fiscal year so the actual payment for the roof had been made before the fiscal year began. The school report includes our pre-school, which is

turning out to be a bigger expense than we had planned on. If you have questions about any of this, Jenni, our business manager would be happy to answer them for you.

In our gospel Jesus, who could read people's minds and hearts, commented on the humility of a lady who gave a tiny donation to the Temple and the pride of those who made big donations. If a person gives a small donation and it is made with love, they should not be ashamed; if they can give a large amount, they should be grateful that they are in such a position as to be able to do so. Not being Jesus and not being able to read hearts, I can only assume that a lot of love comes with every donation, but as I am the one who has to pay the bills, I do need to say that those who can afford to make a significant donation do help us pay all our bills. Asking for money is not my favorite pastime, but it is my responsibility to inform you that the church you love is coming up short so far this year. I'm glad I could get this message in before Christmas. Perhaps it might help us to do a little better in our Christmas collection. I thank you for patiently listening, and I thank you for whatever you can do to keep our parish operating in the black.

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – B Cycle **Nov. 15, 2015**

INTRODUCTION: (*Daniel 12,1-3; Heb 10,11-14; Mk 13,24-32*) Most of us, I am sure, are familiar with the last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation. Because the entire New Testament was originally written in Greek, and the Book of Revelation began with the Greek word "apocalypsis," a word which means revelation, the book is also referred to as the Apocalypse. What most people do not know is there are a number of other sections of the Bible that are apocalyptic in nature; that is, they reveal to God's people what is going to take place. Usually they were composed during a time when God's people were being persecuted to give hope to God's people during those difficult times. The message usually was that if God's people remained faithful to God, their sufferings would soon be at an end and God, or perhaps God's delegate, the Messiah, would overcome God's enemies and would initiate an era of peace. This era of peace was spoken as God's reign or God's kingdom. Our first reading today, from the Book of Daniel, written about 165 BC, is an example of apocalyptic writing. The Jews were being forced to adopt the pagan religion of the Greeks, otherwise they were persecuted and killed. The time was described as "unsurpassed in distress." In today's passage, Daniel the seer predicts that soon the Archangel Michael, the guardian of the Jews, would come to the aid of God's people. The passage contains a clear belief in resurrection to glory for those who remained faithful and a resurrection to everlasting horror for those who had not.

HOMILY: For those who like to use big words, I have one for you: eschatology. It means a study of the last things. It derives from the Greek eschaton – the things that are to take place at the end of the world. As the year draws to a close, our scripture readings want us to remember that our world as we know it will not continue on forever. God has other plans for us – to be with him forever. It is basic common sense, if we are aware of what is ahead, we will be better prepared to deal with it when it comes.

We just heard a little bit of what the Bible teaches us about the end time, the eschaton. Prior to today's reading, Mark tells us the topic came up as the apostles were admiring the Temple. Jesus prophesied its destruction (which was to take place in the year 70 AD); then he began speaking of wars and natural disasters and families breaking apart and other tribulations that his people would suffer. Then we come to today's gospel. The central feature of the end time will be the return of the glorified Jesus and his calling together those who have lived as God has desired we should. Today's first reading, taken from the Book of Daniel, said they will live forever. Daniel doesn't say what will happen to the others who have not followed God's ways, but it isn't pretty.

Let me repeat that Jesus' return is the key feature of the end time. In today's gospel, Jesus is telling us that the whole cosmos will signal his coming. The sun and moon and stars will no longer be needed, for Christ himself will be our light. Just as we know that summer is coming from signs in nature, so there will be signs that the Son of Man is coming soon. Just how soon is the big question. It is vague enough to urge us to always be ready to meet the Lord. That's a message that bears repeating, and so Jesus repeats this message in a second parable a few verses after today's gospel when he compares the coming of the Son of Man to a man who goes on a long journey. His servants do not know when he might return, whether in the evening or midnight or early morning or whenever, and he warns his servants that when he returns he doesn't want to find them goofing off. It is a parable that exhorts us to constant vigilance.

Almost always, Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man. It is an ambiguous title and Jesus probably uses it to make people think deeply about what it might mean. No one (none of the apostles or anyone) used this title to refer to Jesus, except Jesus himself. Basically it means "a human being," but there is a passage in the Book of Daniel (not today's passage) which describes one like a "Son of Man" who comes on the clouds of heaven and who is presented to God (referred to as "the Ancient One") who gives this Son of Man authority, honor and royal power over all the nations of the world so people of every race and nation and language would obey him. It is obvious that this second meaning far surpasses the idea of just "a human being."

There are a couple of things in today's gospel that really challenge Scripture scholars. Jesus said "this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place." Some scholars interpret "this generation" to mean the Jewish people, or Christians or the human race in general. Others say it refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple; i.e., the signs that will announce Jesus' coming. It certainly reflects the immanence of his coming, perhaps it refers to his coming to each one of us at the time of our death.

Another challenge for scholars is Jesus' statement about when he shall return. He says: "of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father." It could refer to his human nature, which had to grow in wisdom and age and grace just as we do, and his human nature was not informed of the day nor the hour. Some scholar refer to the words "nor the Son" as an addition by a scribe. Nowhere else in Mark's gospel does Jesus refer to himself as simply "the Son." As a matter of fact, in the Acts of the Apostles (1,7), Jesus said to the apostles "it is not for you [disciples] to know the times or periods." He does not say "it is not for me to know," but he says "it is not for you to know." There is no conclusive understanding; maybe he did know and wouldn't say, or maybe he didn't know because of his human limitations.

100% of those who have predicted the second coming of Christ and the end of the world at a certain day and time have been wrong. Just two weeks ago, I got a warning by email that it will happen before the end of the year. If they are right, they would be the first person in 2000 years who was. How do we live in this period of expectation of Christ's second coming? Some people expect it's right around the corner. Some think, "oh, we have to hear about that again. It probably won't happen for a million years." While others are too busy to think about any of this stuff right now and they have forgotten that Jesus wants us to live in expectation of his return, so when he comes we can meet him not as a stranger but as a friend.

Feast of Christ the King – B Cycle **Nov. 22, 2015**

INTRODUCTION: Our first reading is a very short reading. It would be difficult to understand without knowing what immediately preceded it. So, I'll tell you. One night Daniel had a vision or a dream of a great sea full of monsters. Out of the water came four beasts; the first like a lion with

eagle's wings. It could stand on two feet and had a human mind. The second was like a bear with three tusks; the third like a leopard with four wings and four heads; and the fourth was beyond description having great iron teeth and ten horns along with a little horn with human eyes. The monsters represented nations that had subjected the Jews to extreme suffering: the Babylonians (today's Iraq), the Medes (today's Iran), the Persians (also today's Iran) and lastly the Greeks. That was a summary of the first part of Daniel's vision. But in spite of all the suffering, there is hope, hope that God will send someone to save his people from all their suffering. This will give us a taste of apocalyptic writing – writing that stresses the element of hope for those who remain faithful to God. The rest of Daniel's vision is the part that stresses hope and salvation for God's people. One like a son of man comes on the scene and is presented before God (the Ancient One) and this son of man is given dominion and power over all of creation. The person Daniel describes as coming on the clouds of heaven is not just "a" son of man but "the" son of man, the savior whom God will send who will establish a kingdom that will last forever.

In the gospel for today we see this Son of Man Daniel saw in his vision standing before Pilate trying to explain his kingdom to Pilate. For one reason or another, Pilate didn't want to listen and so in a still famous line: "what is truth," Pilate abruptly ends the conversation and leaves the room where they had been talking.

HOMILY: Each of the four gospels offers its own unique perspective on Jesus' passion and death. In John's gospel, the dominant part of his account of Jesus' passion is the trial before Pilate. A short segment of the trial between Pilate and Jesus is today's gospel. Pilate has Jesus alone in a court room in his residence (called a praetorium). The Jewish priests and elders who wanted Pilate to execute Jesus were outside. Pilate found himself going back and forth during this trial. Pilate, as a representative of the Roman Emperor, has the task of finding out if Jesus is a king for he would then be a rebel against the Emperor, Tiberius Caesar. Jesus' answers focus less on himself being king and more on his kingdom, which is not of this world.

When Pilate asked "are you the king of the Jews," Jesus answered "do you say this on your own, or have others told you about me?" I always wondered why Jesus asked this question. I am guessing perhaps Jesus is questioning whether he has the freedom to speak openly to Pilate or if Pilate's mind is already full of the charges his enemies have brought against Jesus. It's not that Jesus didn't know what was being said about him. He could read minds and hearts. I am just supposing that Jesus wanted Pilate to be aware as to whether Pilate was just working with what he's heard ("hearsay") or whether he had an open mind. Pilate reacted negatively: "Am I a Jew?" he asks, as if to say "do you think I would give two cents for what any of them think?" It was common knowledge that Pilate had deep hatred for the Jews and vice-versa. So Pilate, still in the dark about Jesus, asks: "What have you done?" Jesus takes this as an opportunity to speak openly and honestly. Jesus talked about the kind of kingdom he ruled, a kingdom built on truth. This is why he came into this world, to give witness to the truth. I suppose by now, Pilate was beginning to feel as if he was the one on trial. It was clear to Pilate that Jesus had done nothing wrong and Jesus is pressing him to accept this truth (Pilate had a hard time understanding "truth" whatever it was), while he was struggling with a lot of pressure on him from the crowd outside to put Jesus to death. Besides, a person's life wasn't all that important to Pilate (or to most of the Romans for that matter). He actually lost his job as governor, fired by his boss in Rome, because of his brutality toward the Jews. So with this background, perhaps we can understand why Pilate walked out on Jesus saying "what is truth?"

On this feast of Christ the King, we are prompted to ask ourselves if Jesus is really king in our hearts. Does he really rule our lives? Is he king for us on Sunday (if even that much), while we make up our own rules the rest of the week. The pressures of life sometimes lead us to walk away

rather than keep our mind and heart open to his word. If we fail, however, God in his great mercy is always there, ready to help us serve and love him better. Amen.

1st Sunday of Advent - C Cycle November 29, 2015

Introduction: (*Jeremiah 33,14-16; I Thess. 3, 12-4,2; Luke 21,25-28.34-36*) The Jews lived through some very horrendous times throughout their history and the Babylonian exile was one of the worst of those times. That's when the prophet Jeremiah lived. (587 BC). He witnessed the total destruction of Jerusalem and of its sacred Temple which King Solomon had built three and a half centuries earlier. He witnessed thousands of his fellow citizens enslaved and taken into exile to Babylon. In spite of all this, Jeremiah's words today reflect hope for God's people. God would raise up a shoot; that is, a descendant of King David, who would bring peace and security to Jerusalem. He would send one who would inherit the throne of King David and who would be known as Son of the Most High. He would establish a kingdom that would be forever. Even though that savior has now come, we are constantly aware that still we need to pray for peace and security. "Why?" you may ask – "why hasn't it happened – why is there fighting everywhere?" He himself said the world has not recognized the time of his coming, a lament he made as he wept over the city which he came to save. (Lk. 19,44) His reign is not an illusion for he now reigns forever and his work to bring peace continues on until he can bring all those who follow him into the safety and peace in his kingdom forever. God does not go back on his promises as Jeremiah assures us.

Homily: Jesus said, "no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit." (Jn. 3,5) [Today Isaac Mathew is being born again.] We have to realize that being born again is like when we are first born, it is the beginning of a process of growth and maturity and learning – a process by which we open our hearts more and more fully to God and to those we come in contact with in life. Our second birth will hopefully lead us into greater and greater union with Christ until we are fully united with him forever in his kingdom. The season of Advent, which now begins, reminds us to prepare for his final coming so that when he comes, we will experience not fear, but liberation and joy and the life and love for which we were created. At this time of the year, when we should be vigilant in preparing for our Lord's coming, the Lord warns us not to be burdened with dissipation and drinking to excess and the anxieties of everyday life. And isn't it such an irony that it's this time of year when such things burden us the most. Amen.