

Homily for the Sunday in the Octave of All Saints' Day, November 6, 2016, at the Cathedral Church of the Epiphany, Columbia, SC. Text: Rev. 7: 13 "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and whence have they come?"

There was once a football player at Columbia University who was quiet and had no great athletic ability. He had determination, but the coach would not put him in a game unless Columbia was safely ahead. The coach sometimes saw him on campus, always arm in arm with a man who was apparently his father. Just before Columbia's biggest game of the season this young man went boldly to the coach's office and asked if he could start in the game as a half-back. The coach was astonished. Anyone else might have been tossed out of the office. But the coach was too wise to throw this man out. "You're not exactly a star player, and I've got to concentrate on winning. I'm not here to hand out favors. But I'm going to start you. Maybe you'll be in there for only a very short time, but if it means that much to you I'll do it."

The outcome was fabulous. The young player seemed to win the game single-handedly. After the game, in the locker room, the coach took him aside. "I didn't know you had it in you. How did you do it?" The young man said, "Do you remember the man you've seen me with on campus? He is my father, and he was totally blind. He died last Monday, and this was the first game he ever saw me play."

Today we celebrate the great harvest of God's saints, living and departed, knit together in one communion and fellowship. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who cheer us on and pray for us. The Church is one, an organic whole through time and space. We are one in Christ with the saints who have gone before us...the saints, men, women and children, who are known as saints to God, and were never named as such on earth, or put on the Church's calendars. All Saints' tide is an eight day time of rejoicing for the great ingathering of the harvest of saints in the Kingdom. Just as it is harvest time for the crops that will be our food, so too it is harvest time in the Kingdom, for all the saints.

The call to holiness goes out to every one of us. Holiness is wholeness, the integration of all our faculties in Christ, whole-hearted consecration to God. To be a saint means to be called out from the world and set apart for God. So God wants all of us to be saints. He is the one who makes saints. We don't make ourselves... He makes us. The only tragedy in life is not to be a saint.

Is holiness possible for you and me? Can we be saints? We can be, if we so desire. We can be, if we give God permission to act in our lives, and transform us. God

will make us what He created us to be, if we let Him. We can consecrate ourselves to God whole-heartedly right this minute, and become what we already are. We are saints, but we are becoming so...God gives us tremendous encouragement because the thing we have to become, we already are.

One encouragement to wholeness is the Bible, the love story between God and man. The Bible takes us from tragic defeat to glorious triumph. Today's Epistle is from Revelation, written by the Apostle John. John knew about trials and persecutions. At a very old age he survived a vat of boiling oil and so was exiled on the Isle of Patmos. He wrote Revelation to encourage persecuted Christians, by sharing the apocalypse, the unveiling, of the cosmic triumph of God and his saints. The key to understanding Revelation is the Eucharist, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. In the Eucharist we are lifted in the Spirit to sup with Christ at His Table, in His Kingdom, in the glory of the new creation, surrounded by all the angels and saints.

Another encouragement to wholeness in this life is the support from the saints who have gone before. The Columbia football player got a boost from his deceased father, alive in Christ in heaven and one with us in Christ's Body on earth. Our destiny is to grow in wholeness, aided by the prayers of the saints, until we join them in heaven. What growth we don't finish in this life God will help us to complete hereafter, but we want to go as far as we can towards wholeness in this life.

From Christ's victory comes the marriage of heaven and earth, of time and eternity. This organic wholeness of the Church we call the Communion of Saints. One of the fascinating things about the Communion of Saints is what G. K. Chesterton called "the democracy of the dead." Whenever we examine an issue in the Church, or vote on something, the dead in Christ have a vote. Their vote in heaven is always in accord with Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition. However many votes the heretics, the secular humanists and the globalists of our day think they can muster, they can't outvote the Communion of Saints.

So we thank God for the extraordinary harvest of the saints, so rich and varied. We thank God for the unspeakable joys of heaven. We thank Him for the vision we will have of Him, and of one another, perfectly restored in Christ. As someone once said, "The door to the homeland of the heart's desire is open, and there shall be no more parting of friends." Amen.

