

[Readings: Rev. 7:2-4, 9-14; Psalm 24; 1 John 3:1-3; Matt 5:1-12a]

*A Time for Heroes* is a fitting title for today's feast of All Saints. The title comes from a book by Robert Dilenschneider. In his introduction, he writes that before September 11, 2001, "heroism had become so devalued that the term 'hero' was primarily applied to athletes, to comic book and video-game characters. Instead of real heroes, we had super-heroes and action heroes."

But September 11, 2001 changed all that. He continues, "In the wake of that catastrophe, a few public figures ascended to heroic heights, including hundreds of firefighters, police officers, emergency medical technicians, and ordinary men and women. Since that day, heroism no longer sounds like an old-fashioned idea. On the contrary, it seems fresh."

To prove that there is no shortage of heroes, the author assembles an awesome array of people who qualify as heroes. His list includes Winston Churchill and Harry Truman, Charles Lindberg and Amelia Earhart, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago and little Ruby Nell Bridges, the six-year-old black child who integrated an all-white school in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1960.

Today's celebration of All Saints is an emphatic reminder that our faith heroes are the people we now honor as saints. Our First Reading from Revelation makes two attempts to give us the number of our "holy heroes." John tells us he "heard the number of those who had been marked by the seal, one hundred and forty-four thousand." This is not a literal number. This multiple of a decade, a dozen and a thousand are numbers signifying completeness and is meant to be all-inclusive. Even if it was to be taken literally, the Roman Catholic Church has officially acknowledged only twelve thousand of them. With my luck, if I made it to the Pearly Gates, my ticket number would be 144,012!

We still have a way to go! We are only at the 8.3% mark! That should give us great hope! Then, to make sure that nobody is left out of the count, John writes that he has a "vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people and tongue."

We cannot possibly know all of them. But it is possible and important that we get to know some of them, even those who lived among us and with us in our time and in our place. Who knows, the list might even include you and me one day! Another John reminds us in our Second Reading: “Beloved... we are God’s children NOW; what we shall be has not yet been revealed.” One day, “we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

Now, imagine Jesus seated on the hillside in today’s Gospel passage. Several of His disciples, including you and me, are gathered in front of Him. He looks intently into the eyes of each one of us. He recalls our individual stories. He knows our hopes and our fears. He recognizes that we are the ones who will suffer for the sake of His message. Focusing on the face of one of these disciples, a man who was recently betrayed by a good friend, the Teacher says to him: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, the Kingdom of Heaven is yours.”

Turning to another, Jesus sees a disciple who is mourning the recent death of his wife and child, and Jesus assures him: “Blessed are they who mourn; they will be comforted.”

The Greek word *makarioi* which is repeated nine times in this Gospel, is usually translated as “blessed” or “happy.” But imagine Jesus using the word, “Congratulations!” instead. Some scholars support this translation. “Blessed” means you are favored by God. “Happy” means that your joy will be complete one day. “Congratulations” means, “We did it! We made it through life together! We passed the test of life’s unfairness and we have been found faithful!”

What is our prize for living a life of the Beatitudes? “The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to YOU!” “The Kingdom of Heaven and all its blessings are yours!” A heroic ending for ordinary lives lived in extraordinary ways! AMEN!