

This week we celebrate All Saints Day. We pause in our lives to honor and celebrate the “official” Saints of the Church, as well as the lives of saints spelled with a small “s”- those who have lived amongst us. Yes, there are the Saints that have been officially recognized, but as St. Paul has reminded us in his letters, the followers of Jesus in our parish are also saints. Later in the service we will remember those among us who have died since All Saints Day last year.

We do this because there is an intimate connection between those who have been released from this world and those of us who are still getting up in the morning, drinking coffee, praying, and trying to make some sense of our lives. The connection is that we all- those living, and those who have died in the faith, share a common trust in Jesus and are open to God’s guidance and intervention in our lives.

With this in mind, I turn to one of the readings for today from The Revelation to John, (chapter 21). Talk about intervention- John is given a vision from above. It is a vision of the holy city of Jerusalem- a New Jerusalem, descending from the clouds- and a vision of God re-arranging our reality and giving us a **“new heaven and a new earth.”**

Now many have seen this vision as a picture of the future- the final coming of Christ and an eternal scrambling of all we are familiar with. A prediction of the End Times. Whew, finally God is going to something about this mess.

I understand the yearning for this new world- some abrupt change- this new heaven and new earth. It is a form of escapism from the pains and tears and tragedies, chaos, and sadness that go with being alive. I recently watched the short ride into space where actor William Shatner was allowed to sit in that capsule and for a few minutes be hurled out of this world into space. He was temporarily removed from our daily life. As many astronauts have shared before him, their whole perspective on the planet and our daily life was changed. It was a temporary escape. Look at most car ads on TV. A person encounters a crazy family scenario when arriving home from work, and returns to a quiet car cabin or drives to the rim of the Grand Canyon- to escape. Look at drug usage. Alcohol use. Music concerts. Temporary escape. We all understand this urge because we have all been there.

But I would suggest we approach this text from a different angle. We have all prayed our Lord’s prayer- **“Thy Kingdom come, on earth as it is in Heaven.”** But when we pray “thy kingdom come” we are not praying for a quick end of the world, -at least I don’t think- but maybe I am wrong. Maybe some of you are praying for this, and I can’t blame you. When I pray these words I am praying for an intervention of grace into our daily life. On earth- as it is in heaven. But this vision of John is not necessarily simply a picture of the future- or an escapist way out of this world. William Shatner was hurled up to the heavens. But scripture says that the Holy City descended- comes down to us. Remember Jacob and that ladder. He didn’t climb it. The angels came down. And that is how we are called to live our life in this time and this place. This vision is not totally predictive of a future ending, it is also a revealing how our Lord assists the lives of praying people in the here and now.

You see, Jesus does not just promise a bag of gold at the end of the rainbow. He is with us through the resurrection to renew us.

Jesus transforms the **cross into glory**. Bread and the wine from the earth change into **grace**. Chaos changes to **peace**. With Jesus, there are not two spaces-heaven and earth-but through Jesus one space. And where death tries to reign- life emerges.

Look at Lazarus, from the Gospel reading today. He dies. There are tears and wailing. Even some blaming going on. And with Jesus' words, "Come forth," he emerges from the place of death. Life from death. Now my first thought is that if I was Lazarus, I would be mad. I was released from this difficult world and headed to the promised land beyond-and then, zap-I'm stuck here again. This isn't exactly a "thank you, Jesus moment. But his privilege was that his raising was used a sign that Jesus, moved by compassion for the relatives, brings Lazarus back. Yes, he had to go through death again, but I hope he had a peaceful death. And that he lived the rest of his life knowing the experience of the kiss of heaven and renewal that comes from above. After maybe getting mad, I hope he appreciated his glimpse of the afterlife as well as a few more years with his loved ones, and most importantly, renewal in his life. How could things go back to normal after all that?

It is true, a 24-hour New Heaven, New Earth is not possible until the final coming. We are stuck here with our human weaknesses and our sin. These saints we remember today-they were not perfect people. They were just like you and me-doing some loving things, messing up in other places, asking for forgiveness, and starting over the next morning. It is a matter of living in this broken world and trying -in a piecemeal fashion, to live in the space where heaven and earth unite, trusting that God's intervention is always near- and even sometimes clear.

We are called to be motivated through this vision from The Revelation and in every situation -imagine ourselves in a "new heaven and a new earth" -with every encounter we experience. I am privileged to see this a few times every week as I visit the 93-yr old going on 30 and the 70-year-old facing the last days of his life. There is the miracle of energy and optimism in the aged and the despair of illness in those younger. And in both cases we simply ask Jesus to keep interceding on our behalf.

And oh, how heaven kisses earth sometimes. No matter the circumstance, the presence of Jesus does **wipe away the tears, bless the life, and give balm to the pain**. Jesus says "I am making all things new" and despite the problems facing us, heaven often does seem to kiss earth.

Yes, we often want to escape, like William Shatner. And -Yes, we will someday. So today we give thanks for those saints who have done the best they could here on earth and are now in God's arms. We give thanks to the great cloud of other witnesses that have come before us and are possibly guiding us from above. And we keep our lives open to the vision of a New Heaven and New Earth as we care for one another.

The bottom line is: We are not called to suck up life and wait for the escape hatch. We are called to live into Christ's renewal right now. Amen