All Saints Day (A) – Sunday 01 November 2020 –

Revelation 7:9-17 / Psalm 34:1-10, 22 / 1 John 3:1-3 / Matthew 5:1-12

As you have all probably heard me proclaim – on multiple occasions – I consider myself to be the Queen of Internet Searches.

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I am willing to concede that *might* be a bit of hubris, but one takes affirmation where one can, and I like to tell myself that if anyone wants to find something on the internet – the regular internet, not the dark-site creepy part – I can do it for them.

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And being the Internet Search Queen makes me, by default, a Rabbit Hole Princess; because one cannot find images for child sacrifice to the Babylonian god Marduk, or stereo cartridges for mid-century consoles discontinued decades ago, or an answer to the question of whether genome-wide meta-analysis has identified regions of chromosome 7p21 as a determinant of habitual caffeine consumption – it has, in case you, too, were wondering – without finding yourself in a lot of peculiar places.

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All this is by way of saying that I consider myself something of an expert on rabbit holes, and I therefore feel certified to tell you that Revelation is not merely a rabbit hole, but an entire rabbit warren.

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If you mention “Revelation” – and in spite of what you often hear coming from people’s lips, there is only one of them, the book is *not* “Revelations” – If you mention “Revelation” to anyone with even marginal biblical literacy, they either light up like metal halide sports lights at a Red Sox night game or scrunch their face into a “please spare me” grimace.

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I am something of a face-scruncher, although I think that’s more because I’m afraid of the metal halide sports light people than the text itself.

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Anyway, the point is that there is simply too much in this weird, graphic, inscrutable, science-fiction-like piece of apocalyptic writing than we can possibly deal with here and now, even limiting ourselves to these 8 verses.

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What we *can* do on this All Saints Day, however, is focus on those white-robed palm-wavers standing around the throne of God.

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Who are they, exactly? Prophets? Apostles? Martyrs? All the “Big Names?”

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Any chance this great “Communion of Saints” includes anybody any of us might have known personally?

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Well, yes, yes, yes, yes, and yes.

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Included in this great “Communion of Saints” are “all the usual suspects,” but also *countless* people who have touched *you* in some deeply personal way through the years with their engagement, their love, insights, and the value of their lives.

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Author and Church of Scotland minister Tom Gordon has what I think is a wonderful way of helping to conceptualize the meaning, importance, and wonder of the rather nebulous concept of a “Communion of Saints” in a way that can actually make it useful.

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I think I like it so much because it helps me make sense of all those strange conversations I have with “myself” inside my head, but who knows, maybe you might like it for the same reason.

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Deep inside of each of us, Gordon says, there is a table.

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The size, shape, and composition of it doesn’t matter.

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What matters is who sits around it, because these are the people – whether or not you even like them – who mean something to you, who influence you, who have a relationship with you that profoundly affects your life.

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The people around this table may be alive or dead, they may be intimate contacts or people you have never actually met – an author or artist, perhaps – they may be of greater or lesser importance.

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But because they matter to you somehow, in some way, they sit at your table. And together – they are your communion of saints.

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Consciously or sub-consciously, in specific or vague ways, sometimes without any particular knowledge that it is happening, you commune with them, you sit down at your table and talk, listen, learn, and absorb wisdom from each of them.

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And, like the prophets of old, who were deemed to be in such deep relationship with God that they somehow entered into the inner sanctum and directly communed with The Holy One, you carry things away from your conversations – insight, clarity, food for thought, direction, decision – all sorts of things.

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Everyone has a table with their saints seated around it, influencing, impacting, and intervening, for better or worse.

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Now you can, of course, sit around this table and commune with your *living* saints, even if they are not physically – or even *electronically* – present.

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This is how I make sense of all those strange conversations I have with my *mother* inside my head – as opposed to the ones I have with her on the phone.

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But when those who are living pass from this life, they still have their place at your table; their influence does not necessarily diminish, although they may wander off from time to time on some heavenly errand or another.

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Those of your saints who have gone on before you may no longer be with you in physical terms, but they live on in the various bits they have contributed to the “you” you are.

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Their influence – the indelible impression they have made – their legacy – these will always be available to you.

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You will still be in relationship with them –in fact you might even develop a better understanding of that relationship; they will still have a place around your table.

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So this begs the question – “Who are the people around your table?”

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Who matters? Who has a seat? Who are the saints in your communion?

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In other words, which relationships make a difference in your thought process, your perceptions, your actions? Who has influenced – who *is* influencing – you?

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Have you thought intentionally about the way they have affected you? Do you appreciate the way they talk to you, or do you need to sit down and sort some things out with them – whether they be living or dead?

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And there is another question that merits thought.

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At whose table are you sitting?

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I can guarantee that you are an influence for someone, somewhere; an influence which may very well continue after you die.

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Recalling that sometimes helps me remember my table manners.

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“Unsaintly” saint that you may be, you are still a saint in someone’s communion, an everyday saint sitting at the table in someone’s heart.

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*And* you are poised to be one of the incalculable number of saints gathered around the throne of God.

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That’s a nifty thing about being relieved of the constraints of mortality – you can do things like that simultaneously.

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You *have* saints – and you *are* a saint – even if neither they nor you are *always* practically perfect people.

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Because sainthood is not a “reward” for righteous living.

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Sainthood is the way you are expected to live as a child of God.

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In other words, sainthood not *conferred* by God as part of some quid pro quo scheme – “If you do this, I’ll bless you with that”.

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Sainthood is *undertaken* because you believe God has said, “Because I love you and call you one of my children, I expect you to live in a certain way in order to experience, and appreciate, the extent of my blessing”.

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So take heed of those saints seated at your inner table. Listen to their counsel, heed their wisdom, and accept *their* blessing, because all true blessing is ultimately from God.

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Take heed of those hosts at whose table you sit. Offer them your counsel, your wisdom and your blessing.

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And take heed of the other witnesses in that great cloud; of all the saints, living and dead, of the angels and elders and the four living creatures, whomever or whatever *they* might be.

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Finally, offer God your ceaseless praise: “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and always. Amen.”