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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA
November 1, 2020
Year A, All Saints' Day, Revised Common Lectionary
[Revelation 7:9-17](#)
[Psalm 34:1-10, 22](#)
[1 John 3:1-3](#)
[Matthew 5:1-12](#)

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Who are these, like stars appearing, these before God's throne who stand?
Each a golden crown is wearing; who are all this glorious band?
Alleluia! Hark, they sing, praising loud their heavenly King.

Who are these of dazzling brightness, these in God's own truth arrayed,
Clad in robes of purest whiteness, robes whose luster never shall fade,
Never be touched by time's rude hand? Whence come all this glorious band?

These are they whose hearts were riven, sore with woe and anguish tried,
Who in prayer full oft have striven with the God they glorified;
Now, their painful conflict o'er, God has made them weep no more.

Those are words from a hymn we might have sung today, if it weren't that the pandemic has forbidden us to sing together, for the time being. We're celebrating All Saints' Day a little differently this year at Incarnation. We are missing the white hanging mobile made by Diane Schoenrock where we usually pin slips with the names of our beloved saints. We are missing the figures of saints old and new, Mary and Francis and Dr. King and Mother Teresa, that are usually paraded down the aisle. On the other hand, we have our outdoor *ofrenda* and our prayer flags in Jerusalem Courtyard bearing names and photos and artifacts of those who have gone before. And what's the same is that the saints are once again gathering with us around this table to join in the eternal act of praise to the God who sustained them in their time and sustains us in ours.

The word "saint" can mean more than one thing. Sometimes we use it for those great figures of the faith we remember as living examples of what it looks like to follow Jesus. St. Paul and St. Mary, St. Francis and St. Clare. But it has a broader meaning too. In the New Testament it's used simply to refer to Christians in general, to all the members of the Church, which are a holy people, a kind of collective sainthood. Paul's letters usually start out, "To the saints in Corinth," "To the saints in Rome," "To the saints in Philippi," even though a lot of those ordinary, very flawed believers he was writing to clearly weren't what we might typically

think of as saints. But they'd put their faith in Jesus and been baptized into his name, and that was what made them holy.

So today we gather as the saints at Incarnation, Santa Rosa. And today April and Summer Davidson are taking their places in that number: what the book of Revelation calls "that great multitude no one can count," robed in white. Today April and Summer are washing their robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb. Today they are drinking deeply from the springs of the water of life. Today the life of Jesus flows into them to make them saints, to make them holy, just as every member of his body is holy, not out of their own merits but out of God's limitless love and grace.

It says that great multitude comes "from all tribes and peoples and languages." The saints of God have lived in all times and all conditions. We can hold onto that as we prepare for an election this week whose consequences will be vast no matter what the outcomes will be. The saints of God have endured under good governments and under very bad ones. Under dictatorships, empires, and democracies, and sometimes in conditions of total anarchy. There have been pandemics. There have been wars and famines. And sometimes there have even been seasons of relative peace and prosperity. But following Jesus has never been a guarantee of a comfortable life—rather the opposite. "These are the ones who have come out of the great ordeal," says the angel to John. Following Jesus involves struggle—because it means taking up a way of life that goes against the grain of what the world's systems of power and prestige expect.

In a few minutes April and Summer will make promises about that way of life, and the rest of us will be asked to join in those promises with them. Resisting evil. Practicing repentance. Seeking and serving Christ in all persons. Loving our neighbor as ourselves. Striving for justice and peace and respecting the dignity of every human being. The wording is different but the spirit of these baptismal commitments is the same one that animates the Beatitudes, the famous series of blessings Jesus offers in our gospel reading today.

The world tends to say: Blessed are the brash. Blessed are the wealthy. Blessed are those who sow division. Blessed are those who can humiliate their enemies. But Jesus says the opposite. The saints are called to be poor in spirit. Peacemakers. Merciful. Pure in heart. Thirsty for justice. And the saints might mourn. And they might be persecuted. Because sooner or later if you follow the way of Jesus you'll collide with another set of values. But Jesus shows us that what the world thinks is power isn't true power. We serve a God who loves those who are left out, those who are poor, and those who are persecuted. And who will shelter them, and reward them greatly, and wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Today April and Summer take their places in the great chain of saints throughout all time and eternity. They do it in these waters, this fountain of life. And each of us today will have the chance to join in the renewal of our baptismal covenant and to be sprinkled anew with the waters of baptism. If you've been baptized, remember that you are clothed with Christ. Let yourself feel the Holy Spirit stir up that gift in you afresh today. If you haven't been baptized, know how deeply God loves and cherishes you, and perhaps let the Spirit work on you to wonder whether you too might be called to these waters.

There's an inscription on the ancient baptismal font of the city of Rome, a great big pool where every single new Christian used to come to be baptized in the early centuries of the church. I want to leave us with it today:

Here is born in Spirit-soaked fertility
a brood destined for another City,
begotten by the breath of God.

Reborn in these depths they reach for heaven's realm.

This spring is life that floods the world, its awesome source coming from the wounds of Christ.

They know no hate who are made one here by one font, one Spirit, one faith.

Sinner, come, and fear not your sins: for those born here are holy.