The text for the sermon this morning is written in the seventh verse of the seventh chapter of the Revelation of Jesus Christ to St. John the Divine: “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb.”

When we think about the saints, certain names naturally come to mind. We often think of St. Peter and St. Paul, St. John, and the great Fathers and Doctors of the Church. We remember the martyrs who gave their lives for Christ, the missionaries who carried the Gospel into distant lands, and the holy men and women whose faithfulness helped shape the life of the Church. Their names appear in our calendars, their lives are remembered in books, and some have churches named in their honor. And it is right that we should remember them, because their lives bear witness to what the grace of God can accomplish – and some we will remember later in the Mass.

But today's feast is about something much larger than the saints whose names we recognize. In the lesson for the Epistle, St. John is given a vision of heaven – and what he sees is extraordinary – “a great multitude, which no man could number.” They come from every nation, kindred, people, and tongue,

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standing before the throne of God, clothed in white robes, with palms in their hands. – It's a picture of the Church Triumphant, gathered in the presence of God. And what strikes me about that multitude is that, although St. John tells us where they have come from, he does not give us their names – or at least point out one or two.

And perhaps that is because most of the saints in heaven were probably never famous on earth. They never wrote great theological works or accomplished anything that the world considered particularly important. – Their names may never have appeared in a history book, and even the memory of their lives may have disappeared from the earth centuries ago. – But they were known to God. – He knew their struggles, their prayers, their sacrifices, and their faithfulness. – And although they may have been forgotten to the world, they have not been forgotten by the One who called them to Himself.

And that raises an important question: What made these people saints? – Was it something extraordinary they accomplished? – Or was there something about the way they lived that we sometimes overlook when we think about holiness? – The Gospel helps us answer that question, because in the Beatitudes

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our Lord describes the character of those who belong to His Kingdom.

And His description is rather different from what we might expect. Jesus does not begin by blessing the powerful, the successful, or even those who have accomplished great things in His Name. – No, He begins by saying "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And He goes on to bless those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. – These are not necessarily the qualities that bring a person worldly recognition. – Humility rarely attracts much attention, and neither does patience. Yet these are the very qualities our Lord identifies with those who are blessed.

St. John Chrysostom makes an important observation about the Beatitudes. He points out that Jesus does not restrict these blessings to the disciples gathered around Him. Rather, His words are addressed to everyone who is willing to follow Him. He further notes that a person's position in life, education, or worldly circumstances presents no barrier to receiving these blessings. – Holiness is not reserved for some special class of Christians – it is the calling of every Christian.

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And perhaps that should change the way we think about the saints whose names we never knew. – Among that great multitude, there may be a mother or father who spent years faithfully raising children in the Christian Faith, someone who patiently cared for a sick husband or wife, and someone who quietly provided for a neighbor in need. There may be Christians who struggled against the same sins for most of their lives, yet continued to repent, seek forgiveness, and begin again. None of those lives would necessarily attract much attention – but think again about what our Lord says in the Gospel: "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." – How many acts of mercy have been performed quietly, with no expectation of recognition?

Now, we should be careful not to misunderstand what our Lord is teaching. – The Beatitudes are not simply a list of admirable human qualities, as though being kind, patient, or generous were enough by themselves to make us saints. – Christian holiness is something more than good behavior – it is the life of Christ taking shape within us through the grace of God. – The virtues described in the Beatitudes are not merely accomplishments for which we congratulate ourselves. They are the fruits of a life increasingly surrendered to Christ.

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And that brings us back to the lesson for the Epistle, because St. John is told something very important about the multitude gathered before the throne. One of the elders asks, “What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?” And the answer is that they have come out of great tribulation and “have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” – Their robes have been washed in the blood of Christ. – They stand before God's throne because Jesus Christ has redeemed them. Their holiness is the work of His grace, received in faith and lived out through repentance, obedience, and love.

That is important because we can sometimes imagine the saints as people who never struggled with the weaknesses that trouble us. – But consider St. Peter, who denied our Lord three times – or St. Paul, who once persecuted the Church. Their lives remind us that holiness does not mean having never sinned – it means allowing the grace and mercy of God to transform us. – The saints were not people who had no need of a Savior. – They were people who came to know just how much they needed Him.

And this is where the Collect for All Saints' Day becomes especially meaningful. In it we prayed, “O Almighty God, who hast knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the

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mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord." – Those words remind us that the saints are not simply figures from the Church's distant past. They are members of the same Body of Christ to which we belong. – The Church is not limited to the congregation gathered in this building, or even to Christians living throughout the world today. – It includes those who have completed their earthly course and now rejoice in the presence of God.

We sometimes speak of the Church Militant here on earth and the Church Triumphant in heaven. – These are not two separate churches, but one Church united under one Head, Jesus Christ. And that is something we acknowledge every time we celebrate the Holy Communion. In the Sanctus, we join our voices "with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven" in praising the holiness and glory of God. We worship the same Lord, belong to the same mystical Body, and look toward the day when we shall behold Him in His glory.

But the Collect does not simply ask that we remember the saints or admire their accomplishments. It asks God to "grant us grace so to follow thy blessed Saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys" which He has prepared for those who love Him. – In other words, the Church

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places the lives of the saints before us – not merely to admire – but so we may look forward with hope.

And what awaits those who remain faithful? St. John tells us that the saints shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, and that "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." – The saints were not spared all the sorrows of this world. They knew grief, disappointment, suffering, and loss, just as we do. – But those things no longer have any power over them. The promises Christ made in the Beatitudes have reached their fulfillment – those who mourned have been comforted, those who hungered after righteousness have been filled, and those who were pure in heart now rejoice in the presence of God.

So perhaps on this All Saints' Day, as we remember the great men and women whose names have been preserved by the Church, we should also give thanks for the countless saints whose names we shall never know in this life. Their faithfulness may have been hidden from the world, but it was never hidden from God.

And perhaps there is something else we should remember. – They were once where we are. They had sins to resist, sorrows to bear, prayers to say, people to forgive, duties to perform, and days when faithfulness probably seemed very ordinary indeed. – Yet the

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grace of God was at work in them. – And that same grace is at work in us.

We may never write great books. We may never be remembered by history. No church may ever bear our name. – But that is not what God requires of us. – He asks us to be faithful: to repent when we fall, to forgive as we have been forgiven, to show mercy, to seek righteousness, to love Him, and to love those whom He places before us.

For the saints were not people who had no need of a Savior. They were men and women who learned how completely they needed Christ, and who allowed His grace to transform them. – And one day, by that same grace, may we take our place with that multitude which no man can number, before the throne and before the Lamb.

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