

All Saints – The Heavenly Liturgy

In the name of the Father ...

The Book of Revelation affords us a glimpse of the heavenly liturgy which the Church triumphant conducts in heaven. St. John describes an innumerable multitude before God's throne adoring Him, a panoply of angels and saints arranged in hierarchy, resplendent with the virtues of apostles, prophets, evangelists, martyrs, pontiffs, doctors, confessors, virgins, widows, kings, queens, all arranged to reflect the glory of God.

This heavenly liturgy is ordered, hierarchical and oriented: the choirs of angels and saints are arranged before the throne of God, focused on Him. John writes: *There was a throne set in heaven, and upon the throne one sitting... And they rested not day and night, saying: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come. And ... in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures and ... of the ancients, a Lamb standing, as it were slain.*¹

This heavenly liturgy is reverent, reverence the foundation of any relation between a creature and the transcendent Creator. *And the four living creatures said: Amen. And the four and twenty ancients fell down on their faces and adored him who lives for ever and ever. And all the angels stood round about the throne and the ancients and the four living creatures. And they fell down before the throne upon their faces and adored God.*²

After the Fall, God began to restore the divine liturgy. On Mount Sinai, He instructed Moses in the Tabernacle's construction and the worship to be conducted therein, which was ordered and hierarchical: distinct roles were assigned to the high priest, the priests and the Levites, with clear instructions on boundaries to be observed. This worship was oriented, focused on the Holy of Holies wherein was the Ark of the Covenant upon which rested God's symbolic presence, though hidden behind a veil. And this worship was reverent, for whenever Moses and Aaron entered the Tabernacle, they prostrated themselves on the ground. So also must Catholic worship be ordered, hierarchical, oriented and reverent.

Further, Jewish liturgical worship was characterised by God's symbolic presence. The heavenly liturgy is characterised by the manifest vision of God's substance. The fulfilment of one and the precursor of the other, Catholic worship is characterised by God's substantial presence but still hidden under symbols. Indeed, after singing *Holy, Holy, Holy...* made substantially but sacramentally present on the altar before the throne is... *the Lamb, as it were slain.*

This liturgy, then, is not primarily about us: it is about God. It is focused on Him and glorifies Him. Indeed, this liturgy is a microcosm of the whole of creation, which exists to glorify God.

In today's gospel, the Beatitudes describe growth in grace and *charity*, advancement in the spiritual life. Creation exists for God's glory, and each creature reflects God's glory by achieving the perfection ordained by

¹[Rev 4:2, 8; 5:6](#)

²[Rev 5:14; 7:11](#)

God. We, then, give glory to God by becoming great saints, advancing through the Beatitudes, to take up our place among those choirs of angels and saints arranged in hierarchy, resplendent with the virtues. At St Paul writes: *That your charity may abound more and more ... filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*³

The last of the Beatitudes describes the pinnacle of the spiritual life here on earth: *Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, falsely, for my sake: Be glad and rejoice for your reward is very great in heaven.*⁴ Witness Our Lord's example, consummating His earthly life on the Cross – *the Lamb who was slain* – yes for our redemption, but primarily for the glory of God,⁵ indeed the culmination of creation glorifying God.

Those who advance in *charity* will attain to the higher places before the throne of God, especially those who suffer persecution, who are reviled, mocked, ostracised for the sake of righteousness. As John writes: *These are they who have come out of the great tribulation and have washed their robes and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God: and they serve him day and night in his temple.*⁶

Today we honour that innumerable multitude, known and unknown, who willingly forsook all things – even, and especially, their very lives – that they might be found worthy to enter the choirs of heaven to worship face-to-face the living God and the Lamb.

*And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne ... and the ancients saying with a loud voice: The Lamb who was slain is worthy to receive power and divinity and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and benediction. And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth, and ... in the sea ... I heard all saying: To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, benediction and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever. And the twenty-four ancients fell down on their faces and adored Him who lives for ever and ever.*⁷

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³ [Phil 1:9](#)

⁴ [Mt 5:10-12](#)

⁵ [Jn 17:1](#)

⁶ [Rev 7:14-15](#)

⁷ [Rev 5:11-14](#)