

A Bible Bullet (aimed at the heart)

Feast of All Saints

Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14; 1 John 3:1-3; Matt. 5:1-12

The reading that will cause confusion this week is the selection from the Book of Revelation. The entire book is apocalyptic in style and filled with symbolism understood by the readers of John's era, but not well by us. Apocalyptic writing usually comes from an era or group enduring persecution or powerlessness. The writings of Ezekiel and Daniel in the Prophetic books of the Old Testament fit this description as well. Whenever reading from Revelation, it is wise to consult a reliable commentary so that the teaching of the Church is made clear. This book is often the source of confusion between mainline Christians and Christian Fundamentalists. Its style uses codes understood by a particular audience in a particular time. Accepting its message literally is a mistake. The reference used for this Bullet will be The Book of Revelation: A Catholic Interpretation of the Apocalypse by Rev. John Tickle.

I saw another angel come up from the east holding the seal of the living God.

East is symbolic language for the direction from which salvation comes. The sun rises in the east and thus from the east comes the light of salvation. The seal in God's hand is God's plan for the world. He cries out to the other angels to continue holding back the winds until he imprints his seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God. Imprinting with a seal is an ancient custom that indicates ownership and the promise of protection. It is also a seal of approval.

I heard the number of those who were so marked--onehundred and forty-four thousand.

The twelve tribes of Israel squared times one thousand equals one hundred forty-four thousand. It is a symbolic number which means a limitless number will be sealed with salvation because there will be a limitless number of people from every race and nation who will listen to the Lord. Please note how different this is from the belief in predestination, widely held by Presbyterians, and the salvation of only 144,000.

I saw before me a huge crowd which no one could count from every nation and race, people and tongue. They stood before the throne and the Lamb, dressed in long white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, "Salvation is from our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb!"

One of the elders then explains that these white-robed people are those who have survived the great trial; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. These are the martyrs who suffered persecution for following Jesus. These same will minister to God in his heavenly temple for all eternity.

(All scholarly credit is due to Rev. Tickle.)