

## Bible Challenge November 5-11, 2017

Advent's weekly Bible Challenge is based upon the readings assigned for each Sunday. The Basic challenge is to re-read the texts that were read on Sunday morning and included in the Sunday bulletin. You may want to recall how the passages were incorporated into the sermon. The Adventure and Explorer challenges are suggestions to deepen your knowledge of the Bible. The challenge is organized as one reading for each of five days, but find a pace or style that fits your schedule.

### INTRODUCTION

*November 5, All Saints Sunday, celebrates the baptized people of God, living and dead, who are the body of Christ. As November heralds the dying of the landscape in many northern regions, the readings and liturgy call us to remember all who have died in Christ and whose baptism is complete. At the Lord's table we gather with the faithful of every time and place, trusting that the promises of God will be fulfilled and that all tears will be wiped away in the new Jerusalem.*

### FIRST READING: Revelation 7:9-17

*The book of Revelation is written to seven churches in western Asia Minor during a time of great oppression. Today's reading is a response to the question asked in 6:17: "Who is able to stand?" The writer gives the faithful the assurance of God's protection and a vision of victory.*

<sup>9</sup>After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup>They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" <sup>11</sup>And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, <sup>12</sup>singing, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." <sup>13</sup>Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" <sup>14</sup>I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup>For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. <sup>16</sup>They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; <sup>17</sup>for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

**Adventure Challenge:** Revelation 7.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Read an introduction to Revelations. *Option B.* Research the four living creatures or any other word or phrase you don't recognize. *Option C.* This passage draws heavily on images of idealized royalty, a victorious king-figure able to protect and provide for all loyal followers. How might the scene be drawn using modern political and social imagery? Could heaven be an idealized democracy?

### PSALM: Psalm 34:1-10, 22

*Delivered from terrors, the psalmist calls us to bless the Lord at all times; even lions are sometimes hungry, but those who fear the LORD lack nothing that is good.*

I will bless the LORD at all times;  
the praise of God shall ever be in my mouth.

<sup>2</sup>I will glory in the LORD;  
let the lowly hear and rejoice.

<sup>3</sup>Proclaim with me the greatness of the LORD;  
let us exalt God's name together.

<sup>4</sup>I sought the LORD, who answered me  
and delivered me from all my terrors.

<sup>5</sup>Look upon the LORD and be radiant,

and let not your faces be ashamed.  
<sup>6</sup>I called in my affliction, and the LORD heard me  
and saved me from all my troubles.  
<sup>7</sup>The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear the LORD  
and delivers them.  
<sup>8</sup>Taste and see that the LORD is good;  
happy are they who take refuge in God!  
<sup>9</sup>Fear the LORD, you saints of the LORD,  
for those who fear the LORD lack nothing.  
<sup>10</sup>The lions are in want and suffer hunger,  
but those who seek the LORD lack nothing that is good.  
<sup>22</sup>O LORD, you redeem the life of your servants,  
and those who put their trust in you will not be punished.

**Adventure Challenge:** Psalm 34

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* In Hebrew this psalm is an *alphabetic acrostic*; research what this means. *Option B.* Research *fear the Lord*, a phrase used frequently in the Bible. (Wikipedia has an interesting short article; a Google search produces several interesting options.)

## SECOND READING: 1 John 3:1-3

*A saint is one who has been set apart by God for God's purposes. God, out of divine love, set us apart to be the children of God. Our holy hope is that we shall see God as God really is.*

<sup>1</sup>See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. <sup>2</sup>Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. <sup>3</sup>And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

**Adventure Challenge:** 1 John 3.

**Explorer Challenge:** Read an introduction to or summary of 1 John. When was it written? What are its key ideas?

## GOSPEL: Matthew 5:1-12

*In the Beatitudes, Jesus provides a unique description of those who are blessed with God's favor. His teaching is surprising and shocking to those who seek wealth, fame, and control over others.*

<sup>1</sup>When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup>Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: <sup>3</sup>"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. <sup>5</sup>Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup>Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. <sup>7</sup>Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. <sup>8</sup>Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. <sup>9</sup>Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. <sup>10</sup>Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup>Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account <sup>12</sup>Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

**Adventure Challenge:** Matthew 5 (or Matthew 5 – 7 to read the whole of Jesus' sermon).

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Research *The Sermon on the Mount*. *Option B.* Research *The Beatitudes*.

## PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, you have knit your people together in one communion in the mystical body of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Grant us grace to follow your blessed saints in lives of faith and commitment, and to know the inexpressible joys you have prepared for those who love you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### **GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

They are before the throne of God, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. (*Rev. 7:15*)

**Adventure Challenge:** In honor of All Saints Day, make a short list of saints who have been important to you (those you have known personally or those you have read about or studied), thanking God for their contribution to your life.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Research the Lutheran Calendar of Saints (Wikipedia has an article), and explore a few names you don't recognize or you'd like to know more about. *Option B.* Research one of the saints of the Reformation: for example Philipp Melanchthon, Johann von Staupitz, Nicolaus von Zinzendorf, or John Calvin.