

# HOMILETICS

by

**Bernard J. LeFrois, S.V.D.**

## I. BIBLICAL NOTE FOR HOMILIES

### SOLEMNITY OF ALL SAINTS

(November 1, 1976)

**First Reading:** Revelation 7: 2-4. 9-14.

**Second Reading:** First John 3: 1-3

**Gospel Reading:** Matthew 5: 1-12a

**First Reading:** Victory is the chief theme of the book of Revelation: the victory of Christ who through his sufferings and death now reigns gloriously and triumphant; and victory of all his followers who have remained faithful to him in all trials and sufferings. Chapter seven presents a brilliant pageant in a double vision: that of the suffering People of God on earth and that of the triumphant People of God before his throne in heaven. The former need have no fear of any adversity, not even death itself, if they belong to God (this is symbolized by the "sealing" which denotes ownership, for kings placed their seal on their documents and possessions). They are described by the foundation number of both Israel and the Apostolic Church, the symbolic twelve denoting completeness. One hundred and forty-four thousand is the number twelve squared and multiplied by the cube of the sacred number ten, to denote fullness in the highest degree. The number is symbolic in value, not numerical. In a second vision, God's People stand triumphant before the throne of God and the Lamb, breaking forth in exultant praise of the Lamb to whom they owe their victory. Only by his passion and death (Blood) and by reliving it with him, were they able to be reborn and be continuously delivered from all evil. Washing their robes refers to a continual purifying process which climaxes in victory. Hence the palm of victory and their undying gratitude.

**Gospel Reading:** In this first of the five discourses in Matthew's Gospel (the "sermon on the mount"), Jesus is portrayed as the New Moses on the mountain, bringing law and revelation to completion in the perfec-

tion of love. The beatitudes present the new spirit demanded of all Christ's followers. Their motivation is not temporal but looks forward to the end-times: possess the land (messianic blessings), be comforted (with God's victory over evil), see God (in direct vision), be filled (with divine delights), the kingdom or reign of God (final fulfillment). All these are various aspects of salvation brought by Christ but to be fully realized in the final end-kingdom or complete reign of God over the just. An additional "ninth" beatitude (v. 11) seems to be an elaboration of the eighth. Also the "meek or lowly" may be a marginal explanation of the "poor in spirit", thus making the original number of beatitudes in Matthew to be seven, the covenant number preferred by Matthew throughout his gospel. "Poor in spirit" are not the poor as such, but those who in the midst of all their privations place their entire trust in God and are submissive to his will, the "anawim" of Israel who depend entirely on Yahweh for everything.

**Second Reading:** All through this letter, the Beloved Disciple is breathing an atmosphere of love. Here he also infuses sentiments of profound hope. Divine sonship shared with God's own Son is the Christian's supreme boast. It is already possessed, but its complete fruition will be in the end-kingdom where God reigns supreme, and it will consist in the direct vision of God as well as perfect conformity with Christ. Such a goal is worth every effort to steer clear of sin at all costs. No matter if God's children are not recognized here below for what they are. Neither was God's own Son!

### THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (November 7, 1976)

**First Reading:** Another anecdote from the life of Elijah which heightens his authority as a prophet. His name means "Yahweh is my God." During the three years famine, Elijah turns to a poor widow for food and drink. (Since she is living in Sidon of Phoenicia, she is probably a pagan). The widow is already in extreme need, being about to prepare a last scanty meal for herself and her only son. Elijah's request makes great demands on her faith in him as a prophet of Yahweh: she is asked to use up the last of her flour to satisfy his hunger first. Believing his prophetic word brings ample reward. Both the prophet as well as the widow and her son live through the famine. Faith, its great rewards, and the power of the prophetic word stand out eminently in this scene.

**Gospel Reading:** Jesus castigates those scribes who hanker after hypocritical outward show, sanctimonious piety as well as honors and recognition in public. In contrast he is full of praise for a simple god-fearing but very poor widow. Her offering was extremely small, amounting to about one sixtieth of a day-laborer's wage. The offerings were placed in

chests labelled for various uses arranged in the court of the women. Like the widow of Sidon (first reading), she offered all she had to live on. That made it so praiseworthy in Christ's eyes that it surpassed all the offerings of those who enjoyed abundance of goods. It was the total offering of herself.

**Second Reading:** A contrast between the high priest of the old covenant on the Day of Atonement and Christ the high priest. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest offered special sacrifices for his sins as well as those of priests and people all, and entering the Most Holy Place he sprinkled that sacrificial blood on the "mercy seat" over the Ark of the Covenant which represented God's Presence, in legal expiation for sins. At the end of the ceremony he came forth, re-appearing to the awaiting crowd, and conferred on them the blessing.

At the climax of his Paschal Mystery, Christ entered not man-made copies of heavenly realities (Ex. 25:40; Hb. 8:5), but heaven itself, into the very Presence of the Father, not with the blood of animals but with his own blood, offered in sacrifice, not again and again but once and for all in his Paschal Mystery, now eternally present before the Father (see Hb. 7: 25). This sacrifice of himself entirely removes all sin from all men of all times. Death for man is only once, so Christ's sacrificial death is but once. Judgment awaits man after death (which also includes reward). The final phase of Christ's Paschal Mystery is its consummation in the sharing of all his blessings with those who are his own.

## THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(November 14, 1976)

**First Reading:** Daniel 12: 1-3

**Second Reading:** Hebrews 10: 11-14. 18

**Gospel Reading:** Mark 13: 24-32

**First Reading:** A vision of the final and greatest persecution before the consummation. "At that time" refers to this and not to the preceding persecutions. Its unsurpassed intensity calls forth the angelic assistance of Michael, the protector of God's People (cf. Rev. 12:7). Some will escape unharmed. These are God's specially chosen ones (symbolized by being enrolled in the book of life: see Ex. 32:32; Rev. 20: 15).

There follows a clear statement of the bodily resurrection of the just, a doctrine that had been only gradually revealed. It comes to the fore in the books written toward the close of the Old Testament era, for example, here in Daniel (written c. 165 B.C.) and 2 Macc. 12: 9.14 etc., (written around 125 B.C.). "Sleep" is metaphor for physical death

(see Jn. 11:11). This same picture of some being kept alive at the end-time and others being raised from the dead is also Paul's clear teaching in 1 Cor. 15:52. St. John (5:29) brings out more clearly that resurrection will be for both the just and the wicked, but the latter unto eternal frustration. There is a double parallel in the last verse. The wise are those who live here below according to God's will and lead many by both word and example to do the same. They are compared to the magnificence of the star-filled heavens.

**Gospel Reading:** Another reference to the period of great tribulation. Apocalyptic style of writing intends the expressions not to be taken literally but figuratively. In the language of imagery, the express here the divine intervention in power and majesty, bringing about the consummation of all things, with Christ coming in glory. His messengers will gather all the elect together. (Another interpretation which holds that the entire passage pertains to Christ's coming and reigning in the Church after his resurrection, with all nations flowing into the Church, hardly fulfills the demands of the text). The little parable of the fig tree in its present setting brings home the lesson of hope and expectation. The great distress is the signal of Christ's coming and should instill hope and expectation in the hearts of the faithful, just as the green leaves of the fig tree herald the coming of summer with its fruits.

"This generation" in its present setting need not refer to a life-span of forty years (though this would fit the second interpretation, given above). It can also have the meaning of the Jewish people as such (cf. Mt. 12: 39). They will live on to witness "these things" (cf. Rom. 11:25). In v. 31, Jesus emphasizes the solidity and permanence of his teaching, regardless of the time of the consummation. In v. 32, Mark is not thinking of the Son in the manner that John constantly theologizes concerning Father and Son (see Jn. 5: 18ff), but as Son in his human capacity. Both "Son" and "angels" have just been mentioned in vv. 26-27. In his human capacity, the emptying of himself (Phil. 2:7) can also involve willing limitation on his knowledge of details concerning specific events.

**Second Reading:** In the many sacrificial rites of the Old Covenant, the priests offered new sacrifices daily. Yet none of these sacrifices nor all of them together could remit sin. Christ's sacrifice of himself is unique: 1) It is once and for all. 2) It truly remits all possible sin. 3) Though offered once, it endures from the very moment of its completion, for at that moment, eternity reigns for Christ. 4) Thus it is permanently effective. All other offerings for sin are rendered meaningless (v. 18).

**Note:** The objection of some non-Catholics that these passages militate against the sacrifice of the Mass is unfounded. The mass is the celebration of the Paschal Mystery. What happened once and for all on Calvary enters into our place and time, and acquires presence and redemptive power within our own being. (Rahner). Though offered once, Christ's sacrifice endures forever.

- 5) It is the source of all holiness for those who are Christ's (cf. 2:10f).  
 6) His sacrificial death was the passageway to his glorious entry into the heavenly sanctuary. There, enthroned with the Father on high, he reigns supreme, while all adversaries, and the entire universe (2: 9) are made subject to him.

## SOLEMNITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE

(November 21, 1976)

**First Reading: Daniel 7: 13-14**

**Second Reading: Revelation 1: 5-8**

**Gospel Reading: John 18: 33b-37**

**First Reading:** Everlasting dominion and indestructible kingship are being given by the Eternal One (the Ancient of Days) to "One like a Son of Man". "Like to" tells us that we are dealing with a symbol. Though in v. 18 the symbol refers to the "holy ones of the Most High" who receive the kingship, Jesus evidently refers the symbol to himself when he said to Caiaphas: "You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mk. 14:62). In Semitic expression of thought one and the same apocalyptic symbol can refer to two objects: a representative individual and the collective group for which he stands. The king is considered as embodying in himself the entire people (cf. Dan. 2: 37.41; 8: 20-22).

The whole passage eminently fits Christ the universal king who receives from the Father "all power in heaven and on earth" (Mt. 28:20) and shares his rule with all who are his (cf. Rev. 2:26). In him is embodied the full ruling power which is given to the saints, and through him it is exercised. As he said to his chosen band: "I for my part assign to you the dominion my Father has assigned to me" (Lk. 22:29). To Mary at the annunciation it was proclaimed that "his rule will be without end" (Lk. 1: 33).

**Gospel Reading:** The representative of the Roman Empire confronts the King of kings in criminal's chains. Jesus does not answer Pilate's direct question, lest he give the impression that he is king in the sense Pilate has in mind, a national, worldly one. His messianic kingship is of a different order. It is in the world but not of the world (see Jn. 17: 14-16). "World" here is mankind subject to sin and the powers of darkness. Jesus offers a simple argument to prove his point: a king of that sort has his army to defend him. Jesus stands seemingly helpless and forsaken before Pilate.

Lest he be misunderstood, Jesus is content to let the title "king" rest on Pilate's lips, without denying it. (The Jerusalem Bible adds "Yes, I am a king" which is not in the original Greek). Christ reigns over the hearts of men in the sense that he has become our Brother to reveal to us the all loving Father, so that his reign be fully established over those who accept his Son. This is Christ's life task: to bear witness to the truth, that is, to God's wonderful revelation of his love, culminating in Christ himself, "who in bearing witness, made his noble profession before Pontius Pilate" (1 Tim. 6:13). Christ reigns over us in so far as we accept his revelation of Good News and carry it out in our lives.

**Second Reading:** A passage replete with deep theology. It is triple in make-up:

1. **Three epithets touch on Christ's death, resurrection and exaltation:**
  - a. The faithful witness, because he revealed perfectly the Father's love, especially by his passion and death (Jn. 19:37).
  - b. First-born from the dead, because his resurrection is the beginning and the source for the resurrection of all mankind (1 Cor. 15: 20-21).
  - c. Universal ruler having power over all creation: "High above every every name that can be given in this age or the age to come" (Eph. 1:21).
2. **Three salvific actions of Christ:**
  - a. He loves us: the verb is in the present tense. His love is present with us always. We can count on it now.
  - b. He delivered us from Satan and sin by his sacrificial death (Rev. 5:9).
  - c. He shares with us his royal priesthood in the service of the Father. Christians united with the sacrifice of Christ are continuing to consecrate the whole world to God. Though suffering now, they shall reign with him ever.
3. **Three glimpses of the glorious triumph of Christ:** It breaks in upon us suddenly and unexpectedly to remind us of the suddenness which Christ foretold would characterize his coming (Mt. 24: 37f). It is vividly introduced by the graphic: See!
  - a. He will be truly manifested as God's divine Son. The cloud is the symbol of divinity (Dan. 7:13). He will come into his own at last.
  - b. Everyone, friend and enemy, will then acknowledge him for who he really is. The Crucified One is the universal King of Glory.
  - c. All will mourn, realizing at last what they have done to him. But time is no more. There is no further opportunity for repentance.

**Confirmation of the message:** 1) By the double confirmatory word, one in Greek and the other in Hebrew (Amen). 2) By the utterance of the unchanging and all-powerful God, described in three phrases:

- a. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alpha bet. In Hebrew, the first and last letters are also first and last of the Hebrew word for "truth". Eternal Truth is the source and goal of all creation.
- b. God is dynamically present to all time and history, who will one day come into his own to be known and recognized by all.
- c. The Almighty One (equivalent in Hebrew to Yahweh, God of hosts), he who accomplishes all things in his own time.

## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

(November 28, 1976)

**First Reading:** Jeremiah 33: 14-16

**Second Reading:** First Thessalonians 3: 12 to 4:2.

**Gospel Reading:** Luke 21: 25-28. 34-36

**First Reading:** A messianic prophecy. God will raise up the Messiah as he promised to David (2 Sm. 7: 11-16). He is called "a just shoot" which alludes to the messianic bud in Is. 11: 1-3. His reign shall be holy and just. Those who dwell in the New Jerusalem (the Church) shall be secure from all harm. The New Jerusalem shall be inscribed with the very name of the Davidic King (as in 23:6), which imports that she is entirely his possession. The name "the Lord is just" is a play on the word "Zedekiah", the last king of Judah.

**Gospel Reading:** In these verses, the tone of Christ's prophecy is no longer restricted to Jerusalem, but reaches out to denote the universal judgment of mankind at the end-time (see v. 35). It describes in figurative, apocalyptic language the signs preceding it. Extraordinary events on earth will bring mankind extreme anguish, and cosmic phenomena (v. 26) will aggravate that distress. All this is prelude to Christ's final and glorious triumph, and it should instill hope and expectation in those of sincere heart. "Roaring of the waters" symbolizes chaos and destruction like the flood-waters in Ps. 93: 2.

Vigilance and continued prayer are the two wings given by Jesus to escape the worst and remain faithful to the end. Those that are all taken up with worldly cares and pleasures will be unexpectedly taken by surprise. The image of the trap or snare is very fitting. It springs suddenly and unexpectedly. Christ's advice holds good for all generations, since the exact time of the consummation has not been revealed.

**Second Reading:** Paul's prayer for his faithful neophytes as earnest preparation for the Coming of Christ is that the Lord Jesus himself grant them a constant progress in 1) mutual brotherly love which is at the same time all-embracing, and 2) deep, interior holiness uniting them more and more with God. Paul also exhorts them to hold fast to the teachings received from him, which he in turn received from the Lord Jesus or the Apostles. This is Christian oral tradition.

## II. HOMILIES

### THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

**November 1, 1976: Solemnity of All Saints**

**The Human Situation:** That our present human existence will be transformed completely into a glorified and wonderful new existence in heaven, is best illustrated by the transformation of a big green caterpillar into a large, beautiful, many-colored moth. The caterpillar is earth-bound, it eats continually till its course is run; then it either burrows into the ground to form a pupa or spins a cocoon around itself. There takes place then a marvellous metamorphosis, so that the identical caterpillar comes forth a winged creature of superb beauty. Now it no longer is tied down to earth but flies wherever it pleases. It is no longer concerned with eating and growing, but its joy is in flight, and it is invariably drawn toward the light. This is one of the wonders of God's nature.

**The Good News:** One of the most consoling truths of our holy faith is the resurrection from death to life of those who have followed Christ. Our dearly beloved ones who have departed from this life have joined the communion of saints and are very much alive in Christ. "God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made him" (Wis. 2:23). Once he has been given existence by his Creator, man is destined to live on forever! If he has died in the friendship of God he is now assured of eternal happiness with God's saints. This happiness no one can take from him. It is everlasting and enduring. He is now forever in the company of all those who have fought the good fight, and remained faithful to God through all life's trials and sufferings.

It is an honorable and religious deed to pay our respects to our beloved deceased. In the book of Wisdom, the Holy Spirit tells us: "The souls of the just are in the hands of God. Their passing away was thought an affliction . . . but they are in peace" (3:1-3). Life on earth may have been hard at times, discouragement may have dogged their steps, suffering may have been their lot, but again the Spirit consoles us: "Chastened