

## OLAS SCRIPTURE COMMENTARIES NOVEMBER 2024 YEAR B

Friday 1st **FEAST OF ALL SAINTS -**

**First Reading Apocalypse 7:2-4, 9-14** - To a modern reader this book reads (for those few who actually open its pages) like a weird science-fiction novel crossed with one of the more lurid video games kids (and some adults) are addicted to. Not far off the mark in a way: it was written by a victim of the Roman Empire that ruled the Mediterranean world with an iron fist and is a heavily coded vision of the final victory of the Christ over the powers of evil, when the faithful who have defied the powers of evil are gathered in. 144000 is the writer's way of saying a vast multitude, all the God's gathered faithful from every race. Their manner of celebration would have been familiar to the original readers- waving of palm branches (think of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday) and bowing to the ground before the throne, much in the manner of Muslim prayer today.

**Second Reading I John 3:1-3** - This lovely poetic description of how we shall come to know God should be a source of encouragement to all who are struggling with life's problems. There is little more that can be added!

**Gospel Matthew 5:1-12** - The author of this Gospel (we call him Matthew for the sake of convenience) was writing for a Jewish Christian community anxious to retain the values of their ancestral religion and worried about the entry of pagans into the community of the believers. They are assured that Jesus was not introducing a new religion, he was the perfect expression of all they held holy. Matthew uses imagery his readers would be familiar with. As Moses climbed Mount Sinai to receive the Law, so Jesus climbs a hilltop to sit, in the traditional posture of a teacher, to deliver his declaration of what it means to be one of God's faithful. The Beatitudes, as we call this pronouncement, might be taken as the "job description" of all Christians. The present difficulties through which the believer struggles are set against the spiritual rewards. The picture of acceptance of suffering, determination not to give in, abiding faith in ultimate justice, offers an intensely personal image of what it means to be Christian.

Sunday 3rd **THIRTY FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

**First Reading: Deuteronomy 6:2-6** - This passage contains the essence of the Covenant between God and his People. "Fear" of God might best be thought of the consciousness of unworthiness before the majesty of the Most High. The passage also offers the historic and essential expression of the Jewish faith, known as the *Shema y'Israel* from the Hebrew words "Listen, O Israel", which is still part of the daily morning and evening daily prayer for observant Jews. The possession of a settled land ("a land of milk and honey") would have seemed to be a paradise for wandering desert tribespeople.

**Second Reading: Hebrews 7: 23-28** - The author continues to develop his theme of Jesus as the Great High Priest. In former times there was a succession of high priests who, each in turn, went through the yearly ritual of offering sacrifice for their own and the nation's sins, but now the Christ through his self-offering, is forever, and his authority is complete. The high priests of old were appointed in accordance with the requirements of the Jewish Law but the Son's mission was revealed by the Father at Jesus' baptism.

**Gospel: Mark 12: 28-34** - The mission of Jesus, presented by Mark as a journey from Galilee has reached its goal, the city of Jerusalem, and Jesus is engaged in his final disputes with his adversaries. Mark presents this legal expert as a sympathetic character who has listened Jesus defending belief in the resurrection against a hostile group of Sadducees ( who didn't accept the belief in a heavenly after-life. Their activities centred on the Temple and they represented the most conservative element in Jewish religion.). He asks Jesus' view on what sums up the entire complex structure of the Jewish religious Law. He must surely have know the answer himself but he is delighted that Jesus gives such an affirmative answer. The lawyer's approval implies that all the ritual in the world (a holocaust was an offering entirely consumed by fire) was meaningless without these two fundamental principles.

## Sunday 10th THIRTY SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

**First Reading: I Kings 17:10-16** - Sidon (in modern day Lebanon) is the scene of today's dramatic story. Elijah was a fierce opponent of the cult of the fertility god Baal, which was encouraged by Ahab, the king of Judah, under the influence of his foreign wives. It was believed that Baal controlled the rains so Elijah announced that his God would send a drought not only on Judah but even on the foreign lands belonging to the god Baal. Through God's power the woman and her son (and Elijah himself) are miraculously provided with food to last out the draught. We can see echoes of the Exodus event in the story – the passage through the parched land, the heavenly provision of manna – illustrating God's protection of his people.

**Second Reading: Hebrews 9: 24-28** - The Temple in Jerusalem was looked on as the earthly image of God's heavenly palace and at its heart was the Sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, the throne of God's presence among his people, where once a year the High Priest came to offer sacrifice for forgiveness of his and the nation's sins. Christ, by contrast, enters the real presence of the Almighty once and for all in making his unique sacrifice. The High Priest of old, in emerging from the Sanctuary, declared the sacrifice to be made and accepted and forgiveness granted. At his Second Coming, the Christ High Priest will offer salvation to the faithful.

**Gospel: Mark 12: 38-44** - Jesus has stern words for the professional “religious” people, recognised by their ostentatious style of dress, who enjoy being received with deference and are accustomed to preferential treatment while taking advantage of the generosity of the poor. They are hypocrites sheltering under the disguise of religion. The Temple Treasury was in the outer courtyard, known as the Court of the Women and open to all comers. Thirteen containers, known as “trumpets”, from their shape – narrow at the mouth, wide at the bottom - accepted money offerings. It isn't hard to imagine the sniggers when along comes this poor old soul, with scarcely two pennies to rub together, which she diffidently slips into one of the trumpets.

## Sunday 17th THIRTY THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

**First Reading: Daniel 12:1-3** - This fictional story is set in the years of the Babylonian Exile. The hero is Daniel who through his wisdom and his faithfulness to God is carried safely through all sorts of incredible situations. A large part of the book is taken up with a series of strange apocalyptic visions of the sufferings God's people will have to pass through. But at the end Michael, the angelic guardian of Israel will announce salvation, and the dead shall rise to judgement. Written around the middle of the second century before Christ, this is the first clear biblical statement of a belief in the resurrection from the dead.

**Second Reading: Hebrews 10:11-14,18** - This passage highlights the central point: in Christ the separation between God and humanity has been annihilated. His sacrifice (and we should think of his whole life rather as a sacrifice) has brought at-one-ment with God for all who respond to the gift of grace.

**Gospel: Mark 13:24-32** - Mark's audience, Christians in Rome, were living in fear of abuse and persecution. Although no one can tell when their sufferings will be vindicated, Mark assures them that there will be an end to it all, when the chosen ones will be gathered in. Language of this sort gave rise in later years to a doctrine of Predestination which, at its most basic, proclaimed that God had fore-chosen from all eternity those who were to be saved and those who were to be damned and there was nothing the individual could do about it. It is most unlikely that Mark, or any of the New Testament writers thought in such stark terms. By God's “chosen” Mark was simply thinking of those who had responded to God's call of grace.

Sunday 24th **OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST UNIVERSAL KING**

*We end our liturgical year with this celebration of the Kingship of Christ, a feast day introduced by Pope Pius XI instituted in 1925 at the time when extreme nationalism was taking hold in Europe. By fixing attention on Christ, the King whose kingdom is not worldly power-seeking, he hoped to draw Christians' minds away from thoughts of political domination and oppression.*

**First Reading: Daniel 7:13-14** - Daniel's vision is of the Messiah, ordained by God to achieve once and for all the sovereignty of God on earth. In the writer's mind the "Earth" was above all the restored Jewish kingdom. The prophets had looked forward to the day when Israel's hurts would be healed, and far-off kingdoms would come to worship on God's holy mountain of Jerusalem in recognition of the God of Israel. Daniel's language is apocalyptic, that fantastic style popular among biblical writers at times of great stress and danger (these days we talk about encrypted messages: apocalyptic writing was something similar - if you understood the code, you could interpret what the writer was getting at, otherwise it was gibberish. At least the writer hoped it was so!).

**Second Reading: Apocalypse 1:5-8** - The book of the Apocalypse is a wildly imaginative dream of vision of the ultimate cosmic battle between the powers of evil and the will of God. Christ's kingship is founded on love, love for sinful people, that brought him to death on a cross and to his triumph over death, making us all priests to serve God.

**Gospel: John 18:33-37** - John paints a dramatic picture of the confrontation between the local representative of the then supreme power on earth and this dishevelled figure of the peasant from the up-country region of Galilee. Pontius Pilatus, from a lower-ranking Roman aristocratic family, was Prefect of Judaea and John's account reflects Pilate's well-documented contempt for the unruly, ungrateful people he had to govern. "Am I a Jew?" he asks ironically. As for kingship, Pilate and Jesus are using the same word but Jesus' definition of his Kingship is beyond the Roman's comprehension. His kingdom is founded on truth and his "subjects" are those who listen to that truth.