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**From the Selected Works of Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, D.Phil.**

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## Final Perseverance and a Life of Service

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## **Final Perseverance and a Life of Service**

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## **All Saints Day**

Sunday Readings for November 1, 2009 for Cycle B:

Rv 7:2-4, 9-14; Ps 24; 1 Jn 3:1-3; Mt 5:1-12

### **FINAL PERSEVERANCE AND A LIFE OF SERVICE**

*Lawrence E. Frizzell*

Among the ironies of the modern world we notice that some people celebrate the unity of the human race while their neighbors demonstrate the worst kinds of bigotry. Moreover, we ourselves may speak eloquently of universal sharing of God's gifts and then find that some of our deeds are extremely discriminatory and selfish. Is this inconsistency to be excused as part of the human predicament? Or do we acknowledge that a process of self-purification must accompany our expression of humane ideals? Indeed philosophers and politicians can articulate beautifully the ways in which the world must be transformed. But how many proclaim that the process must begin with their own conversion? Like the prophets before him, Jesus called for a "change of heart" on the part of individuals. That must precede political reforms in any society in order to make these truly effective.

The Church has always emphasized the unity of the human race with the divine Persons of the one God. This is the ancient but ever new theme for the feast of All Saints, with its call to progress toward universal peace by living the beatitudes (Mt 5:1-12).

By the hidden and kindly mystery of God's will a supernatural solidarity reigns among human beings. A consequence of this is that the sin of one person harms other people just as one person's holiness helps others. In this way Christian believers help each other to reach their supernatural destiny... This is the very ancient dogma called the communion of saints (Pope Paul VI, *Apostolic Constitution on the Revision of Indulgences*, January 1, 1967 #4-5).

The vision of John recounted in the selection from the Book of Revelation for this feast depicts the unifying power of God in bringing humanity together around the people of Israel. The symbolic number of 144,000 drawn from the twelve tribes descending from Jacob implies that the prophetic hopes will be fulfilled. "The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah" (Jer 31:33; see Ez 37:15-28). However, the writer arrives at the number twelve by counting Joseph and his son Manasseh as two tribes; the reader looks in vain for the tribe of Dan (see Rv 7:4-8). We learn elsewhere in the Scriptures that the gift of free will can be abused and all people will be judged on the basis of their deeds. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on... Let them find rest from their labors, for their works accompany them" (Rv 14:13). The vicious side of Dan described in Genesis 49:17 led story tellers in the time just before Jesus to make Dan a villain in stories about the patriarchs. Within Israel and the world at large, they warn, people must struggle against their "evil inclination" in order to find true happiness with God.

Hope for the salvation of people from far-off nations is an important aspect of prophetic teaching (Is 2:2-5; Zec 8:20-23; 14:16-21, etc.) and later literature. "All the nations of the world shall be

converted and shall offer true worship to God..." (Tobit 14:6). Building on the accounts of Abraham's destiny (Gn 12:3; 17:4, etc.), Jesus and the early Church declared that the New Covenant would be open to an innumerable multitude "from every nation, race, people and tongue" (Rv 7:9). If only Christians could grasp that the absence of discrimination in the heavenly court requires the same generosity of spirit among people here-and-now!

John's description of eternal life is based on the imagery of the royal court and Temple, which exemplified the most elegant and elaborate settings known to those who would listen to his message. Imagine being part of a great Eucharistic congress with all the fanfare of an international community at its most impressive! This would be our equivalent to what John portrayed, with the mysterious presence of God the Father symbolized by a royal throne and the Lamb, once slain but now victorious (see Rv 5:6), as the mediator of divine gifts. Who are these people celebrating the mercy of God through Christ's sacrifice? "They are the ones who have survived the great period of trial; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rv 7:14). In the early Church teachers prepared every Christian to face the supreme test of martyrdom. Not a comfortable thought! Yet in the past century vast numbers of people have been challenged to follow their conscience in similar demanding situations. Would we have this courage or, like Dan in the story of Joseph and Aseneth, might we collaborate with the enemy? Coming humbly and frequently to the Lamb of God who forgives the world's sins, each of us asks for the strength to be faithful, now and at the hour of our death.