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Today's Word
The Thirty-first Sunday, Year A (1 November)

Parish Priest: Father Hiroshi Konishi

First Reading: Revelation 7:2－4, 9－14
Second Reading: 1 John 3:1－3
Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:1－12a

November is often called the "Month of the Dead," but I believe it is, rather, a season for reflecting on the "end times." The "end times" refer both to death as the end of one's own life and to the end of the world as the conclusion of this world.
The Sunday Scripture readings in November gradually shift to focus on the "end times," and finally, in the last week of November (November 22 this year), as the Church celebrates "Christ the King," we reaffirm the core of our faith: that through the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in the "end times" and His reign over all creation, all things will share in God's life.
This month, as we are invited to meditate on these "last days," we first celebrate All Saints' Day (November 1). Saints are those who lived out Jesus' Gospel message—"Blessed are the poor in spirit"—to the fullest. The saints are already in heaven, sharing in the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus Christ. In heaven, they continually raise their voices in song of praise to God the Father together with Christ. May we, too, walk our journey of faith in this world with the saints as our models.

The day after the Feast of All Saints, we remember all the departed and offer prayers for them ("All Souls' Day"). The departed have ended their earthly lives and set out on a journey toward their return to Heaven. Just as we who live on earth walk the path of faith toward God, so too do most of the departed journey toward Heaven while offering prayers of atonement. We must pray for the departed, that they may reach God's presence in the mercy and grace of God the Father. And we pray that, from beyond this world, they may guide, encourage, and intercede on behalf of us who are still living.

In this way, through the “Feast of All Saints” and “All Souls’ Day,” the Church on earth communes with the Church in heaven, and together they raise their voices in praise. Let us examine the “Feast of All Saints” and “All Souls’ Day” from the perspective of “communion.”

In the Church, fellowship with others and fellowship with God are born. We have already experienced fellowship with one another in the Church, and while we should also be experiencing fellowship with God, the reality is that this is often not very clear to us.

Beyond the earthly world in which we live lies the heavenly world. It has traditionally been called the “afterlife,” “Heaven,” “the Kingdom of Heaven,” “the Kingdom of God,” or “Paradise”—but in any case, it is the place where God dwells. There, centered on the Lord Jesus Christ, many who have already departed from this world, together with the Blessed Virgin Mary and the angels, ceaselessly praise and glorify God the Father. “Amen. Praise, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power, and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen” (Revelation 7:12). This is the voice of praise from the heavenly Church. The Church on earth—that is, our gathering here and now—joins its voice of praise to that of the heavenly Church, extolling and praising God. The purpose of life is to offer praise and thanksgiving to God, who grants grace freely. We live our entire lives to extol God and give thanks to Him. The purpose of the Church is the same. We are always grateful for the grace we have received from God through the Lord Jesus Christ, and we offer our thanks to God the Father who bestowed that grace upon us.

Unfortunately, however, no matter how splendid the earthly church may be, no matter how solemn the liturgy we offer, and no matter how beautifully we praise God with all our voices, those voices do not reach God in heaven. This is because we are sinners. That is precisely why our humble voices of praise are allowed to resonate alongside the voices of praise from the heavenly Church. In this way, the two Churches—heavenly and earthly—become one, enabling us to fulfill our mission of praising the Triune God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Here, a great “communion” between earth and heaven is born.

The saints did not become saints simply because they performed noble deeds or lived righteously. They are saints because, through God’s gratuitous grace, they sought to live out the “communion” manifested by the Church—both during their lives and after their deaths. We catch a glimpse of the saints in the Word of God proclaimed during the Mass of All Saints: “These are the ones who have come through great

tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (First Reading: Rev 7:14). The saints are those who experienced great tribulation in their lives. "See what great love the Father has lavished on us" (Second Reading: 1 John 3:1). The saints are people loved by God. "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:3). Unless we live relying on God, we cannot survive even for a moment. The saints knew this poverty of their own hearts all too well.

"Living through suffering," "living as children of God, loved by Him," and "living by relying on God and acknowledging the poverty of our hearts"—these are not just for the saints. They are the very essence of how we Christians are called to live. Suffering exists. But when we believe that we are loved by God and live by relying on Him, we are, without even realizing it, living in communion with God.

November, the Month of the Dead, invites us to look toward "the end times." At the beginning of this month, letting our thoughts wander to the magnificent songs of praise in heaven leads us to the hope that someday, each and every one of us will complete our earthly lives and be welcomed into this community of praise.