

**Week of All Saints' Day – Year A – November 9, 2011 - Homily**  
**Revelation 7:9-17; Psalm 34:1-10, 22; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12**  
**Susan E. Wilmot**

Here's one of those awesome God-incidences. Here we all are gathered in what we call the sanctuary of this holy space, whilst all the time our very bodies are also sanctuaries of the Lord! We are temples of the Holy Spirit, and our bodies are holy, set aside for God's purpose. The process of becoming holy is called sanctification, and begins with the gift of the Holy Spirit at our baptism. Some of you might know the contemporary Gospel song that goes like this, "Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary / Pure and holy, tried and true / With thanksgiving, I'll be a living / Sanctuary for You."

Tonight's reading from the first letter of John highlights some of the now and not yet aspects of our faith. It explores the hope we hold in faith during our ongoing transformation into Christ-likeness. All by the power of the Holy Spirit working to purify us from the inside out. In some ways, the question of proving the existence of God seems to be appropriate for this reading. The evidence is entirely convincing through the eyes of faith, but much more circumstantial for non-believers. The evidence of our being children of God, as John describes us, is only concrete as we show ourselves to be different to the world around us. Since "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1) the evidence of our lives is how God uses us to be witnesses of His steadfast love, grace, and compassion in the world.

So what is our witness? What is the evidence of our lives? The first exhibit is in how we show our love for one another in Christian community. This takes many forms, especially patience and forbearance. It is in how we gently welcome the gift of love that covers a multitude of faults in ourselves and in each other. But it also includes, how we show God's love to strangers and even to our enemies. God's love is also evident in us in the kind of ethical behaviors that emulate what we know of the life of Jesus. Such things as an abiding respect for the dignity of every human being. A life filled with prayer, worship and thanksgiving to God. Word and deeds that demonstrate selfless compassion and care for others, especially those who are marginalized, excluded or oppressed for any reason. Amongst other things, Christian discipleship is marked by striving for social justice, equality and goodness. Given that we're each blessed with a variety of God-given gifts, our passion and focus for different ministries will certainly tend to highlight different aspects of discipleship.

As children of God, we are gathered into a glorious spiritual family with bonds that go much deeper than flesh and blood. We're also welcomed into an intimate and caring relationship with God in Christ Jesus. We are co-heirs of God's kingdom, and bearers of the gospel hope. Church fathers, Irenaeus and Athanasius, both claim that God came to earth to be like us, so that we might be like him. Peter's first letter (1 Peter 1:15-16) commends us "as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" For you and me, this transformation begins as an inward, spiritual cleansing akin to the outward and visible washing that we receive in our baptism. It continues and is strengthened through our communal worship. Consider the shape of our liturgy, our communal worship. There are many elements of worship that shape us into holy people. There is an inherent commitment towards purity and holy living through our self-examination and our confession. Our sins are forgiven through the blessing of God's absolution. We share the peace with one another, demonstrating our love and the

reconciliation that God in Christ always seeks for all people and the whole of creation. And best of all, we come to God's table and receive the sacrament of Holy Communion. For us the wafer and wine are the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus that strengthen us, and transform us into the One who feeds us in body, mind and spirit. This is how the shape of our worship together unfolds the mystery of God's blessing in concrete and visible ways. In turn, what we do in worship together with all the saints past and present, shapes us both visibly and spiritually as God's children, and God's witnesses to the world.

When we come to the Lord's Table, we renew our commitment to live lives worthy of Him, so that others may see our love, and recognize God in our lives. When we're drawn to the Lord's Table it's because we truly hunger and thirst for God's righteousness, and desire to be filled by Him. At the Lord's Table we truly taste and see that the Lord is good. God *is* good. The hope of our salvation, of everlasting life in Christ, sustains us in the present, and helps us to resist temptations and poor choices. As co-creators with God, and as the Body of Christ, we are constantly bringing this future hope into our present reality. The Lord is constantly preparing us to be a sanctuary. God's love is pure gift. We don't have to earn it. As children of God, our gift of thanks in His honor is expressed by bringing more of God's goodness to life. The hard question for us to consider this week is why do we so often resist?

Amen.