All Saints + 1 Nov 2026 + Rev 7:2-4, 9-14 + I Jn 3:1-3 + Mt 5:1-12a

Heaven is an endlessly fascinating topic. The book "Heaven is for Real" sold over 1 million copies and was even made into a major movie. Perhaps part of this fascination comes from the fact there is so much we don't know about heaven. So as we celebrate All Saints today, our readings not only help us to learn about heaven, but inspire in us a longing to be there.

To begin, our 1st reading from the book of Revelation answers 2 of the biggest questions about heaven that people have: what do you do in heaven, and who is in heaven? First, *what* we do in heaven. There is a simple one-word answer to this question. And it's not golfing, hunting, sunbathing, or anything we usually associate with rest & relaxation. In heaven, according to the book of Revelation, we will *worship*. Specifically, the Saints worship God the Father and the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, for all eternity.

Next, *who* is in heaven? Contrary to popular belief, heaven isn't made up of "nice people." Rather, according to Revelation, heaven is made up of *the ones who have survived the time of great distress; [who] have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb*. In its original context, this image referred to the martyrs, as so many of the 1st Christians were killed for their faith in Christ. But recognizing that not all Christians will face literal martyrdom, the Church also recognizes so-called "white martyrdom": a kind of daily death to self that is so vividly explained in the Beatitudes in our Gospel today.

But if heaven is ceaseless worship, and requires a kind of martyrdom, some might ask: how many people will really strive to get there? After all, the Beatitudes don't sound like that much fun. Are the Saints really people that we want to imitate? And what is their secret? In order to answer this question, I'd like to look at the life of just one Saint: St. John Paul II.

The shadow of the Cross fell over this future Saint, born Karol Wojtyla in Wadowice Poland in 1920, from his earliest days. His mother passed away when he was only 8 years old. By the time he was 20, he had also lost his only brother and his father. He spent the whole night in prayer before his father's body, and later confided to a friend, *I never felt so alone.*

But that was not the only tragedy in his life. Young Karol sought to follow his passion for Polish Literature, but these dreams were destroyed when the Nazis invaded Poland in 1939 and shut down his university. He took a job in a rock quarry to avoid deportation. Yet even in the midst of Nazi terror, the Lord was still at work. Looking back on this difficult time of his life, the future Saint recalled how he experienced *a progressive detachment from his earlier plans* and a deeper faith. Not long before his death, Pope John Paul II said to a gathering of young people in Switzerland: *I too was 20, like you. I enjoyed sports, skiing, acting. I studied and I worked. I had desires and worries. In those years, now so long ago, when my native Land was wounded by war and then by the totalitarian regime, I sought the meaning to give to my life. I found it in following the Lord Jesus*.

Karol soon discerned a call to the priesthood. But the Nazis had closed the seminaries, and if they discovered a young man was a seminarian, it meant a one-way ticket to the concentration camp. Perhaps thousands of Polish priests and seminarians met that horrible end. But the Lord had His hand on Karol Wojtyla. He studied in secret, the war ended, and he was ordained a priest 80 years ago on this very day, Nov. 1, 1946.

So back to the question at hand: is the promise of heaven made to those who walk the road of the Beatitudes really something worth striving for? For St. John Paul II, the answer was a resounding yes! In that same address to the young people of Switzerland, he challenged the youth to open their hearts to God's calling in their lives, through a vocation to marriage, priesthood, or religious life. Recognizing the fear felt by many young people today over such a call, he said: *I am well aware that you may feel hesitant when faced with such a proposal; but I say to you: do not be afraid! God does not let himself be outdone in generosity! After almost 60 years of being a priest, I am happy to bear my witness to all of you here: it is beautiful to be able to spend oneself without reserve for the cause of the Kingdom of God!*

And spend himself he did! Pope John Paul II survived at least 3 attempts on his life (that we know of), and he even forgave his assassin. He was mercilessly harassed by the Soviets who occupied Poland after World War II. As Pope, his defense for traditional Catholic teachings and morals made him the target of many both outside and inside the Church (the 1980s singer Sinead O'Connor ripped up his photo on an episode of Saturday Night Live). Even today, a certain segment of the Church is trying to throw away his teaching legacy. In his final days, he battled the horrible disease of Parkinsons in public, as a testimony to the dignity of the elderly and the infirm. He truly embraced each Beatitude in his 84 years.

But I don't think even his greatest critics could deny his profound joy—the joy that comes from knowing one's identity as a child of God. In a few unscripted remarks Pope John Paul II gave to a group of seminarians in Rome, he recalled his clandestine seminary days, and how he studied Philosophy in the mines while his co-workers covered for him. And he gave thanks to God for living to share with them what he had learned about life from suffering, and the joy that followed his suffering. Saints like Pope John Paul II unlock for us the hidden logic, the hidden joy of the Beatitudes, and inspire in us a true longing for heaven.

St. John writes in his 1st Letter in our 2nd reading today, *See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are*. So we are! St. John Paul II's last words were reported to be: *let me go to my Father's House.* As we said last week, knowing we are children of our loving Father is truly the secret of the Saints. So St. John continues, *What we shall be has not yet been revealed. But we do know that when it is revealed we shall be like [God], for we shall see him as he is.* And that seeing, that immediacy of the presence of the God, *is* heaven. The Saints now see Him as He is. And if we keep that vision of heaven always before our eyes and walk the road of the Beatitudes here on earth, God will be faithful to us, and we will join all the Saints someday in Heaven.