

May I I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I'm pleased to say that I felt more American this week than I ever have done in my time in America. I started to understand the rules of baseball and actually really got into the World Series. I realized that the team that won it, even though it's pronounced H-O-U-S-T-O-N, is pronounced Houston. So I was cheering for the right team.

On Tuesday, I rushed, I had a meeting. I went in my clerics into a bar, and I sat at the bar watching the baseball. Really enjoyed it, and somebody came up to me and said, that's the best Halloween outfit I've seen this year.

So by Tuesday night, as usual this week, I'd started to think about the sermon. What happens is that on Monday morning, I look at the readings and I just, I think about them and let this develop. The ideas are like seeds. Some grow and germinate, and others just fade away. That's what was happening by Tuesday night this week. Then on Wednesday morning, as often happens, Alex gives me the music that he's chosen for the day.

I like to look at that and see if there's any themes or words in there I can weave into the sermon that I'm thinking about. This week, and I've told him this, I was a bit disappointed by what he gave me. Yes, he'd chosen one of my favorite hymns, "For All the Saints," and he also chose a hymn that includes a reference to the queen and tea, which we'll sing later on, so obviously I thoroughly approved of that. But the anthem he'd chosen for communion was based on the psalm.

I was looking for something based on that reading from Revelation that we just heard. That's where our thoughts were going. That was the passage I wanted to preach on. That first reading, that we had read to us. Instead, the anthem that Alex had chosen picked up a verse tucked away in the psalm that they sang to us. "Taste and see that the Lord is good," and you'll be hearing a beautiful anthem written on that verse later on.

It wasn't quite what I was looking for. I'd not

noticed that verse at all when I was reading the passages for the week, but Alex's choice forced me to go back to it. As I thought about it, images came up of the wonderful farmer's markets we have around here. Those who stand, and this is my own particular weakness, outside the cheese stall, with a plate with little bits of cheese, and they say "Taste. Have a bit, because we've got plenty more in the back we could sell you. Just taste and see how good it is."

It's an invitation. I looked at the readings set for today, and I noticed that they're all orientated towards the future. There's something invitational about all the readings today. They're all about promises which are to come. Look at the gospel reading, the famous beatitudes. Jesus says, "Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger, for they will be filled. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

Then there's that passage from 1 John. "Beloved we are God's children now. What we will be has yet to be revealed." That's an amazing thought. We are yet to reach our final form. What we will be has yet to be revealed. Then of course, we've heard read the first reading, wonderfully rich and vibrant passage from the book of Revelation, the last book in the bible and I'm sure I'm not the only preacher who finds it the hardest book in the bible to preach on, but I wanted to give it a go this week.

In that passage, John sets out in this vivid imagery, a picture of the heavenly life. It's a rare glimpse into the life of heaven. There he depicts a great multitude from every tribe and nation, standing before the throne of God, worshiping the lamb who is Jesus. Four readings, all looking to the future. That's actually characteristics of All Saints' Day which we're celebrating today.

Normally on Saints' Days, we look back. We look back to the life of a particular saint and remember them. On All Saints' Day, we look back and forward. We give thanks, looking back, particularly for the saints who've gone before us and those who've had an influence on the faith of our lives. But we also look forward. We're invited to look forward to the

day when the mystical body of Christ will be complete and God will have wiped away every tear from their eyes.

So I'm grateful to Alex and his choice of music for today. He's helped me to recognize and bring out what's in the readings, that this life is but a foretaste of the life which is to come. In this life, we're invited to taste and see that the Lord is good. In this life, we get a taste. The full banquet is yet to come. One day, all God's people will feast together in his kingdom.

That's a powerful image. It comes across even more powerfully perhaps as we look a bit deeper at that passage in Revelation, which is what I want to do for a few moments. I want to look at that reading in Revelation in context. First of all, there's the context of the first readers. This was a book written for a church that was being persecuted. They were a small Christian community, under threat from the mighty Roman empire. It was hard for them to imagine anything greater than the Roman empire.

But then there's also the context of the passage in the book. It comes in a very significant place in the book of Revelation. I don't know if you're familiar with the book. If you are, you might know that one of the big images in the book of Revelation is the seven seals. Ingmar Bergman fans will be familiar with that.

The opening of these seven seals shows the whole context of history being unveiled in dramatic form. This passage that we've heard read, comes between the opening of the sixth and the seventh and final seal. In the preceding chapter, images such as the four horsemen have been provided which account for every type of evil. It's all there, laid out bare, social strife, ecological disaster, sickness, death, persecution. It's all there in the book of Revelation.

It's laid bare in the chapter before our reading, which ends with this question, which is a rhetorical question. All this evil and strife is laid out. And then we hear this phrase, "Who can stand?" Who can stand against all this evil? Our passage that we've

heard read is the answer to that question.

The answer is so urgent and so vibrant that the unveiling of the seventh seal is delayed until the image is given in full. Who can stand? Chapter 7, from which this is taken, begins with this, "After this, I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth." Who can stand? Well the angels can stand. They are not intimidated by the evil horsemen on the fields of history.

Evil does not dismay them. The whole machinery of providence remains intact. Evil, devastating as it may appear, causes no flutter of fear or hesitation amongst the angels. They stand their ground. Then a paragraph later, as our own passage begins, we see that the multitude which no man could number, stands. The curtain is pulled back in this passage and the depths of reality are unveiled. We see beyond the veneer of war, famine, pestilence and catastrophe. We see that this world is doomed and dying.

It is a world in which the last despairing word is who can stand? St. John sees and hears another reality, less visible but more solid. A world that's already in existence and which no evil can penetrate. A world beyond the control of the Roman empire, of any empire. The seven seals provide a context for understanding evil.

The first seal is a revelation of Christ triumphant over evil. The seventh seal is a revelation of the attentive silence in heaven which meets the prayers of God's faithful people. All evil, what's being depicted is that evil takes place in this context, between a beginning and an end. Evil isn't minimized. It's contained, put in its place. Bracketed between Christ and prayer.

The bible, nowhere offers an explanation of evil. Rather it defines a context. All evil takes place in the historical arena bounded by Christ and prayer. Evil is not explained, but it's surrounded. On All Saints' Day, we remember that the evil in the world we know, which taints the world we know, is not the last word. This life is but a foretaste.

We're all invited to join the ranks of the countless

multitude of saints who have gone before us, in praise of the God who is at the beginning of things and stands at the end of all things, the alpha and the omega. We are citizens here but our commonwealth is in heaven with a God who made us. Taste and see that the Lord is good. There's more to come.

I began this sermon by telling you something about the process, about how I start to write a sermon. Let me close by telling you about the end of that process, because I try to finish the sermon I'm writing by the end of Thursday, so I can enjoy Friday as a day off. But by Thursday this week, I had finished but I wasn't really happy with what I'd written.

Then on Friday evening we went for a walk on La Jolla shores. We went, it was timed perfectly, so we left the Marine Room at 5:00 to walk up the other end of the... not that we were in the Marine Room. I don't want you to think I hang out there all the time. I just got on to the beach there. We went to the other end, to the pier. As we got to the pier, the sun just slipped behind the horizon. There were lots of photographers there. The tourist photographers left at that point. They thought they'd captured all that there was to see.

But the professionals and the locals stayed and kept their cameras fixed on the sky. They knew that the best was yet to come. Sure enough, after the sun slipped over the horizon, for the next 20 minutes, there was a magnificent display of colors, because it was one of those great cloudy sunsets and all the colors were in the clouds. It was magnificent. Those photographers were treated to this magnificent show.

The sun went down and that was only the start. As the sun disappeared from view, so the colors came. That image captured what I wanted to say this morning, more I felt than any words that I'd prepared. Next time you watch one of our magnificent sunsets, think of All Souls' Day and All Saints' Day. Think of the hope that we have in Jesus Christ, that just as the setting sun is not the end, so our passing from this life is only the beginning of our fellowship with all the saints. Amen.