

Last February, the editor of my college's alumni magazine was struggling to accommodate the sheer number of Memorials, or obituaries, that the magazine had been asked to publish. She wrote, "The *large number* of memorials waiting to be published has frustrated many alumni... "[so] this issue also includes an *expanded* Memorials section."

It seems the multitude of deceased alumni had gotten too great to ignore the unpublished obituaries any longer. So, in this issue, the editor was "Publishing these extra Memorials pages" which "*nearly eliminates* our backlog."

The note concludes with the resigned acknowledgement, "It's not a permanent solution."

Because what is, after all, a permanent solution to the backlog of the dead?

All Saints Day is one way the Christian community deals with *our backlog of Memorials*. It's the day we list and enumerate and honor the dead from the previous year and even before that. We come up and light candles for people we think of on this day-- parents, spouses, grandparents, friends, children-- and once lit, the candles visually show the sheer number of people we can call *only* in our minds, multitude of loved ones with whom we can commune *only* in Spirit.

It's quite a backlog. not just our candles, but all the dead, and the texts appointed for this day give us the mystical image from Revelation of "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages standing before the throne and before the Lamb."

Revelation portrays for us the global backlog of the dead: the innumerable multitude lined up with the angels and elders and four living creatures worshipping before the throne of God. Imagine the Memorials section needed to accommodate the backlog of this eternal group. It's a publisher's worst nightmare.

Because when we consider the dead, as we do once a year on All Saints Sunday, the numbers seem to rack up which each candle we light and each person we remember. Death continues its march through human history and through our lives; the list of the deceased seems unending and limitless.

What is, after all, a permanent solution to the backlog of the dead?

No much, it seems.

But that's not the Christian answer. Because as Christians, we do profess a permanent solution to death: it's Jesus Christ.

In our gospel reading for today we see Jesus *assembled before a crowd*, a multitude, offering blessings: Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek, and those hungry and thirsty for righteousness. Blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemaker, and the persecuted.

Blessed, it seems, is the *whole crowd*. Blessed, says Jesus, is this *great multitude*. Blessed are you. Blessed are we. Blessed are all of us. Blessed are the living and the dead.

For doesn't every life have times of being poor in spirit or times of mourning? Doesn't every person have days when they are the meek, and hungry and thirsty for righteousness? At some point in our lives, do not we play the role of the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemaker, and the persecuted? And did not the saints now in heaven play those roles once for us?

While preaching the Beatitudes Jesus looks out at the crowds, looks around at all nations, all tribes and all peoples and all languages, and calls them all "Blessed." Christ offers *everyone* a blessing, and most eagerly shares that blessing with the people in a tough spot, with people who seem like they are stuck in some perpetual backlog: the backlog of mourning or being hungry, the backlog of being the poor in spirit or persecuted, the backlog, in a word, of being dead.

But in Jesus Christ, there is no more backlog. Because of Christ's death and resurrection and the blessing and everlasting life that Christ generously gives, we have the permanent solution death's unending backlog. "For if we have been united with him in a death like his," the apostle Paul reminds us, "we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." "For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again... through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died."

We will continue to die, yes, obituaries will continue to be published. But that doesn't mean Death wins. In Jesus Christ, death's backlog is NOT endless. Death's march stops at the cross on which Christ died and halts at the grave from which Christ rose triumphantly.

Revelation and the Beatitudes teach us how God promises to bring and bless the whole world through this death and resurrection. In Christ, God brings together and blesses all nations, all tribes, all peoples and all languages, a great multitude that has come out of the great ordeal, the mystical body that is the church on earth and in heaven.

And in this promise, there is enough blessing for all enough space around the throne for all enough candles to light for all and enough room in the Memorials section for all to end the backlog of death once and for all.

AMEN.

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All Saints Sunday

Revelation 7:9-17  
1 John 3:1-3  
Matthew 5:1-12  
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