

Readings: Acts 13: 14, 43 – 52; Apocalypse 7: 9, 14 – 17; Psalm 99(100); John 10: 27 – 30.

Today's reading from the Book of Revelation forms part of the conclusion of the second series of John's visions (chapters 4 – 7), in which he sees the worship of heaven. The picture of those taking part in this worship has widened out from the four beasts and twenty-four elders of chapter four to the hosts of angels in chapter five. The description of the heavenly worship is interrupted in chapter six by the opening of six of the seals which allow God's plans for the future to be seen. These plans are for a series of disasters which are to come on the earth, but they include the prayers of those who have already been martyred, whose souls cry out from under the altar, asking when God will avenge their deaths, and who are told to *rest a little longer until the number of martyrs still to come is complete*.

At the beginning of chapter seven we learn that only those marked with the seal of the living God can stand before these disasters.

In the later verses of chapter seven the worship of heaven widens out further to the *huge number, impossible to count, of people from every nation, race, tribe and language*, who stand before the throne of God and before the Lamb, *dressed in white robes, and holding palms in their hands*. It is clear from this part of John's vision that what is being revealed is both the present and the future. The worship of heaven is a present reality, based on events in the past – the sacrificial death of the Lamb, and the martyrdom of some of God's people.

Those described in today's reading are the martyrs of the great persecution which is still to come on the People of God. By their deaths they will have *washed their robes white again in the blood of the Lamb*, and so be able to *serve God day and night in his temple* – that is in heaven.

This part of John's vision ends with promises that those who become the victims of the great persecution will be permanently protected by God who will *spread his tent over them*.

What is more, *the Lamb* – that is Jesus – *will be their shepherd and will lead them to springs of living water*.

Here there is a connection with today's Gospel Reading, in which the Lord says of his sheep: *I give them eternal life; they will never be lost and no one will ever steal them from me*.