

Pentecost 24 / All Saints Observed / November 7, 2021

Revelation 7:14-15

“These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God...”

November 1st is the Day of All Saints. Although we don't always observe it on its day, we always observe it. We observe it, because it is one of the most important feasts in the church year. Although we don't observe it with a banquet, or even a pot luck dinner, it is a feast and so we celebrate it with the sacrament of the Altar. The sacrament of the Altar was instituted by Christ, for the forgiveness of sins and given as a foretaste of the great feast to come; when He returns as King and Lord of all. The feast of All Saints looks forward to the fulfillment of Jesus' words spoken when He instituted the sacrament of the Altar, saying, "I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." It is a foretaste of the great feast of victory when Christ returns and makes all things new and calls all saints to rise and share in His resurrection to eternal life.

Jesus spoke several times about feasting in His kingdom and the feast of the kingdom. In Luke, following the first celebration of the His Holy Supper, Jesus told the disciples, "You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you as my Father assigns to me, a kingdom that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom..." Isaiah spoke of the feast of the kingdom centuries earlier, as the Lord said, "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine...And He will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples...He will swallow up death forever." The feast of All Saints looks forward to that great day and anticipates that great feast, when death is swallowed up by life and God makes His dwelling among His people; His saints made holy in the blood of the Lamb and wipes every tear from our eyes.

Our text is not about that day, but about the time between death and resurrection. It speaks about the saints passing out of the tribulations of this world and more fully into the presence of God and the Lamb to await that day. Our text describes the joy of the saints in heaven as they rest in Christ's peace, awaiting that great and glorious day. A woman I knew came from a funeral and was bothered, because the minister had said that the deceased was looking down on us from heaven. She said that if anyone in heaven could see what was going on down here, it wouldn't be heaven. She was right! In heaven there is no sadness and if people in heaven could see what was happening on earth, they would feel sadness. There is no sadness in heaven for the saints who rest in heaven have passed out of tribulation.

John writes, "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will shelter them with His presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat...and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." If the saints in heaven were aware of what was happening on earth and watching our lives, they would have plenty of tears. There are no tears for the saints in heaven. Our text from Revelation clearly shows the saints rest in the peace of Christ. Their sins are washed away in the blood of the Lamb. They are clothed in garments of His righteousness. All they are aware of is the love of God.

The Feast of All Saints speaks to the peace of believers in heaven and anticipates the day of Christ's return, when He calls the bodies of believers to arise from the dust of the earth, reunites them with their spirits and transforms the bodies of believers alive at that time, into the likeness of His glorious body. Our text comforts believers on earth with the peace of believers in heaven, so we may be encouraged in our faith as we endure the sufferings of this life. Our passage from Revelation assures us that whenever and however death comes to us, it will be our passage into the same place of rest and peace. But the feast of All Saints truly looks forward to the day when the church in heaven and the church on earth are united in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even as Jesus sanctified the earthly resting places of the departed saints through His rest in the tomb, so He will call all believers to share in His resurrection and rise to a new and eternal life in which death, sin and sorrow are no more and joy and gladness reign forever.

Do you want to go to heaven? Most people would probably answer, "Yes, but not too soon." All Saints speaks to the tension believers feel between wanting to be with the Lord in heaven and wanting to remain in this life a little longer. St. Paul was imprisoned. He was uncertain whether he would be released or suffer death. Either way He was victorious in Christ, for neither life nor death will separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus. He wrote

to the Philippians saying, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh it means fruitful labour for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account." We all want to go to heaven someday, but we also have attachments to this life that need to be honoured, as given by God. We have responsibilities to our families, spouse, children, grandchildren, community and congregation. We should respect the gift of life God has given us in this world, even as we look forward to the fullness of life promised to us in Christ.

The glimpse of heaven provided by John's revelation is not meant to lead us to demean, devalue or despise our present life. The vision is given to encourage our faith in this life, give us comfort in our grief and help us bear up under the burdens of our lives, by giving us a foretaste of the peace that is to come and a vision of the life that is truly life; a life which we enjoy even now through faith and experience by gathering as a body of believers; a life which we will enter into more fully at death; a life which we will receive in its fullness in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

How do we get to heaven? Not simply by dying. You have to die to get to heaven, but not everyone who dies goes to heaven. The book of Revelation and our text in particular, show that we get to heaven; through faith in Jesus, in whom we receive the cleansing of His blood that washes away our sins in forgiveness. St. John writes of the saints in heaven, saying, "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb therefore they are before the throne of God..." If we have received Christ as our Saviour, been washed in His blood through baptism into His death and resurrection, we already have heaven in our hearts and are saints in the sight of God. Heaven is to be in the presence of God, in a gracious relationship of forgiveness. A saint is a believer made holy through the forgiveness of sins in the washing of the blood of the Lamb.

We receive forgiveness continuously through the promise of our baptism, which flows as a never-ending river of life to refresh our spirits. We receive forgiveness through the body and blood of Christ in His Holy Supper, under the forms of bread and wine. In the feast of Jesus' body and blood, the Spirit nourishes our faith, sets our minds on the life that is to come, by giving us foretaste of the feast to come. We are brought into God's presence in our spirits now through faith in Jesus. We will experience His presence more fully at death, when we pass out of the tribulations of this life. We will experience the fullness of His presence, soul and body, when Jesus calls us to rise from the dust of death and share in His resurrection in a world made new in righteousness; a world where sin, sorrow and sadness are forever gone and God wipes every tear from our eyes.

All Saints is a feast in remembrance of the saints who have passed out of this world and who now rest in Christ's peace in the presence of the Father. We remember today in our hearts our loved ones who have died in Christ! All Saints is an occasion to remember that all believers are saints, made holy in forgiveness through the blood Christ shed on the cross, cleansed by the washing of renewal and regeneration in our baptism into His death and resurrection. Above all else All Saints is a feast in anticipation of the great feast of victory, which we will celebrate in the presence of God and the Lamb, with all believers on the day He makes all things new and calls us to share in His resurrection to a new and eternal life. May Jesus who has made us holy in the blood of His cross, bring us to that place of rest at death, comfort our souls with in His presence until He calls us to rise body and soul with all saints to receive the fulness of life in His resurrection. In His Name. Amen