

All Saints Sunday, November 6, 2022

Readings: Revelation 7: 2-17, 1 John 3: 1-3, Matthew 5: 1-12

Saints Are Blessed in the Eternal Presence of Christ

"A great multitude from all tribes and peoples and languages," cry out *"salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne"* (Rev. 7:9–17). Faith-filled saints from every place and time with unified voices eternally magnify the Lamb of God. As His beloved children, we too, *"shall see him as he is"* (1 John 3:1–3). Joined with the throng of angels and a myriad of saints, we shall *"serve him day and night in his temple"* (Rev. 7:9–17). In our earthly tension vacillating between saint and sinner, faith and doubt, sacred and profane, we earnestly seek Jesus to calm our fears, comfort our spirits, and forgive our sins. The Holy Spirit, through faith in Christ propels us forward, fortifying us in Word and Sacrament, to our eternal home. In the midst of our constant struggle as believers, we need to be blessed. And so we are. The poor in spirit, the meek, the hungry, the thirsty, the merciful, the pure, and the persecuted are all blessed and we will most certainly inherit the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:1–12).

Sermon Transcript:

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Gospel lesson is from Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount. It's interesting. I was actually listening to somebody talking, looking at their posts and whatnot. They were quoting somebody who said, "The sermon on the Mount is all about things that we do, not about what we are supposed to believe or whatnot. It's all about doing rather than thinking." And I thought, "Man, did they misunderstand this text." Because let's look at what Jesus talks about. Blessed are the poor in spirit and blessed are those who mourn and blessed are the meek. Okay, so here's my charge. Be more poor in spirit. I don't know how you do that. I have no clue how I make you or suggest that you should be more poor in spirit. Okay, mourn more. What? That's not something you just turn on. Okay, I'm going to mourn now for a couple of days. It's tied to situations. It's tied to loss. You don't just mourn, because that's a good thing. It just doesn't make any sense. And be more meek. Okay, well maybe you could try and do that. But really, what this is talking about is not about what we are called to do. It's not about me preaching to you, telling you that you need to try harder to be more meek and more merciful and more pure in heart and be peacemakers, although, some of those things are good. The fact of the matter is that we are poor in spirit. On this side of His second coming, we are poor in spirit because we don't see the fullness of God. We are still confronted with sin, and tribulation, and trial, and sickness, and all sorts of other problems. We are still put upon by the devil, the world and our own sinful nature. So yes, it's just a description. Jesus is saying blessed of the poor in spirit. In other words, I'm blessing all of you. All of us are blessed because Christ has come to us. Our call is to recognize that we're poor in spirit, not to look and say, "Oh, I'm doing pretty well." But to remember and realize that we do mourn because we are yet separated, not just from our loved ones who have died before us, and we do mourn their loss, but we mourn, most importantly, because we are separated from God the Father. Our sins have separated us from Him. That does cause us to mourn. We are meek because we recognize that we are not perfect and that we cannot stand before God of our own merits and worthiness. We recognize also when we're honest with ourselves that we are not as merciful as we could be. We're not as pure in heart as we ought to be. We're not peacemakers as

often as we should. But yet, we are still called the sons of God, not because we have tried harder and accomplished these things, but because Christ has done it for us. He has given us His blessings and His name upon us and therefore we know that we are children of God.

You go back to Revelation and I'm going to show you where it's very clear that we are listed and named in this grouping as servants of God, people who have come and live with Christ. Here we have this list of 144,000 that have been sealed. Now, there's been a lot of confusion about what this number 144,000 is, but it's very simple. 12 tribes of Israel, 12 apostles, 12 times 12 is 144. Then 10 is a number of the fullness of God's action here on earth. Elsewhere in Revelation, we got 10 days of tribulation. We've got day is like a thousand years, the thousand years of trials and tribulations. A thousand is just a number that represents the fullness and the completion of God's work on earth. 10 times 10, times 10, is a triple 10 is God's completeness. It's 144 times a thousand, 144,000. In other words, God's choosing and calling of all of His saints. It's just a number that represents all of us. It's not a specific number that we're supposed to figure out and count, because immediately following those verses about the 12,000 for each of the tribes, the next verse says, "And after this I looked and behold a great multitude that no one could number for every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages were standing before the throne and for the Lamb." Then later on, death.

Well, who are these great multitude of people? They're the ones that have washed the robes in the time of tribulation. Who are these people that John sees, this great multitude? Well, some of them are you and me. We are in the Scriptures. We are in the book of Revelation as part of this great multitude. Remember, John is having a vision of eternity. He's having a vision of the return of Christ and all the saints that are with Christ in His second coming. You know who's part of that group of saints in the second coming? You and me. We're there somewhere. John saw you in his vision, at some point. We are part of that great multitude. See, we know that we are part of the family of God because God has chosen us and we are in that multitude. Our names have been written in the book of life. We have gone through the tribulation of this world and we have been washed in the blood of Christ and we are forgiven, so much so that John, in another one of his books, in 1 John, calls us the children of God. That we are called, not just His servants or His slaves, but we are His children and He loves us. What we will be has not yet appeared, but we will be like Him when He does appear. In that great multitude, when He stands before all of us, we will see Him as His children.

Now, how do we know that we are His children? Who determines who are His children and who are not? Is it based upon your efforts? Is it based upon what you do? Absolutely not. It is based upon the fact, as it says in here, just before the 144,000, do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads. What in the world is that talking about? Well, it's something that has happened to each and every one of us. You and I are sealed. We are sealed by Christ. We have His mark upon our forehead. It is, of course, our baptisms. We are marked as children of God in baptism. Not only are we called children of God, but we are marked by God so that when He sees us, He sees His children because He sees the blood of Christ covering us and He sees us as holy and righteous. Even in the rite of the sacrament of baptism, the pastor will stand before anybody, whether it be infant or a 95-year-old, who is ready to be baptized for the first time, first and only time, the pastor speaks to them and says, "I mark the sign of the cross upon your forehead and upon your heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ." We are the ones who have been sealed. God is not going to destroy this world and bring about the second coming until all that He has called and all that He has marked are in the kingdom. That's all He is waiting for. But He is here. The ones that we have mentioned before, the list of people who have died in the faith this year, they are at peace. They are

there in that multitude right now. We are looking forward to the opportunity because we, as Christians, do go through trials and tribulations. We know that we are not meek. We are not the peacemaker that we ought to be. We don't do all of this, but we do know this. We know that we are forgiven in Christ. We know that we are His children. Therefore, we can celebrate our loved ones who have died.

Again, I was looking at the calendar the other day. I saw that November 1st was listed as All Saints Day. And November 2nd was listed as All Souls Day. I thought, "What in the world is that all about?" Well, it comes about that that's an early church teaching that is still in the Roman Catholic Church, that the saints are separated from the rest of us. When we talk about All Saints, it used to be St. Peter and St. Paul and St. John and St. Mary and all the great people of faith. Then the next day is for all the rest of us. But what Luther discovered when he discovered the Gospel is that all of us are saints before God. There is no distinction. It's not a contest between us and St. Peter, thankfully. But the reality is Peter had the same problems that you and I did. He was a sinner in need of repentance and forgiveness. John and Paul himself, see, they're not saints because of what they did. They're saints because God chose them. God used them for His purposes. So it's God that gets the glory when we recognize and remember the lives of the saints. Both the saints that everybody knows, Peter, John, Mary, Moses and all them, and also the saints that nobody knows except you. Your mother, your grandmother, your grandfather, all those faithful men and women who raised you in the faith, who influenced you in your faith. They're all of us. All of them are saints, and before Christ. They know the glory and the peace that comes.

We will be there with them, because again, John has already seen it. He's seen us because we are marked, and we are sealed, and we are part of that great multitude. What do we have to look forward to? A time when there will be no hunger and no thirst, where the sun will not strike and nor the scorching heat and the Lamb will be in the midst of us as our Shepherd and will guide us to springs of living water. He will wipe every tear from our eyes. What an amazing day that is going to be when we are finally free from the pain, and the hardship, and the trials, and the tribulations of this world. This is why we as Christians are not afraid of death. Do we mourn the loss of our loved ones? Absolutely, we do. But we do not mourn as those without hope, because we know that because we are children, we will be like Christ, restored to new life. We look forward to the day. We look forward to the day when we will rise again and we will see our loved ones once more. But more importantly, not only will we see our loved ones, but we will see God Himself and the Lamb, His Lamb, which purchased salvation for us, Jesus Christ. We will be free and we will be filled with the joy of our salvation.

This is why we can say to live is Christ, and to die is gain, because we've already died in our baptisms. So we've already faced the first death and survived. What fear do we have of the second death if we've been through it already? We are not afraid. We look forward to the joy of our salvation, the time when we will be together with all the saints of heaven, and celebrate the Lamb and in His feast, which goes on forever.

We get a foretaste of it today in the body and blood of Christ. But what more glorious will it be when we stand before the throne with all the angels and archangels and all the multitude of heaven, glorifying and magnifying His name? What a great and glorious day that will be.

May His grace and His mercy and His peace be and abide with you always in this world and in the world to come, because you are His child, marked in Christ in your baptism for all eternity. Amen.