

THE FEAST OF ALL SAINTS

November 1 2017

Deuteronomy 33:1-3

Revelation 7:9-17

Matthew 5:1-12

Standing...

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Tonight we commemorate the blessedness of saints like Peter and Paul, James and John, Mary and Mary Magdalene; saints like Stephen and all the martyrs who were put to death for their confession of Christ; saints like Augustine and Athanasius, Luther and Chemnitz; but also saints like Harold Miller, Janice Wipperman, Jan Polter, members here, among others who have passed through this veil of tears, remembering as well that each of you are saints right along with them.

Let us pray. These are Your words Holy Father, sanctify us in the truth, Thy word is truth.
Amen.

Sitting...

Part of the genius of the Church Calendar is placing
Reformation Day and All Saints' Day back to back.

Reformation is Red:

the color of the martyrs,
the color of blood,
the color of fiery Pentecost.

It's the Church Militant:

at war against Satan and suffering its many crosses.

If you were here last night you heard that the Kingdom of God suffers violence.

It's a lonely way.

Where death reigns,
sin torments and
Satan appears victorious.

The Church is not successful in this life, as the world measures success.

And neither are its members.

And for this reason we have All Saints Day—where the color is White:
 the color of purity, innocence and holiness—
 the color of the saints victorious.
 It's the Church Triumphant:
 clothed in victory, singing joyous hymns of praise.

Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven;
 They are comforted;
 they have inherited the earth;
 they're satisfied;
 they've received mercy;
 and they see God and are called sons of God.

For those saints who've gone before us—
 God has kept His baptismal promise, keeping each one in the one true faith.
 Tears are wiped away from their eyes and now, they see clearly.
 They now feast at the Lord's table without any sin,
 without any worry, or doubt.

While we here remain in the struggle
 and fight and feebly press on in faith,
 trusting not our eyes, but our ears.

And yet, as different as these two Holy Days appear,
 they are not two different churches.
 Not two separate flocks.
 They are one: one, holy, Christian, and apostolic Church.
 See, the saints in heaven and the saints on earth
 are joined together in the Body of Jesus.
 And you, dear saints, are one with the saints of old.

You say, "Pastor, there's not a saintly bone in my body."

I get it.

So, what makes someone a saint?
 Is it how they live their lives—helping others?
 Is it putting up with a certain unbearable someone—
 "Oh, she's a saint, alright, for doing that!"

Is it a certain number of miracles performed in their name?
It's none of these...

What makes a saint has nothing to do with the saint.

Jesus makes saints—doing so in the most un-extraordinary way:
He splashes them with water and speaks His name into them.
He marks their forehead, saying:
"I baptize you in the Name of the Father
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Since Jesus alone is holy, He is properly called, "*Saint*."

But Jesus is never alone.
He refuses to be found without His bride.
As St. Paul said, the two have become one flesh—
"this mystery is profound," and it refers to Christ and His Church.

By faith, God reckons us even now to be among the saints. And now His Spirit, through the Means of Grace, continually renews us in the image of Jesus Christ so that, day by day, we grow into His image and become like Jesus in true righteousness and holiness and blessedness.

So, a saint is simply one of Jesus' own.

And as one of Jesus' own, we come into this place, yet again
to sing our hymns,
pray our prayers,
hear the Word preached and receive the forgiveness of our sins.

But as we enter,
we are not simply entering into an empty space.
Oh sure—
as we look around we might see some mold up there on the ceiling,
certainly hear pews that creak,
see church furniture that hasn't changed in ages...
but Jesus tells us how things really are—
for we enter the worship of heaven.

I trust you realize this...
at every Divine Service,
the Lord Jesus brings heaven to earth,

the mighty angels and all the host of heaven
 to a bunch of clumsy humans,
 making them one,
 as we gather around the Altar.

So, on All Saints Day—

a day that could be filled with sorrow
 because we no longer see those whom we know and love,
 we rejoice knowing that they are not gone forever.

Not at all.

For if Christ is here, which He is, then heaven is here.
 And if heaven is here, which it is, then the saints are here.
 And all is well.

Speaking of Jesus telling us how things really are—

Our reading tonight from Revelation is a vision of Heaven.

St. John was given to peer into this heavenly reality,
 called there to listen, see,
 ask questions, and write it down.

And get this...

St. John saw you there.
 Waving a palm branch.
 Dressed in white.
 Singing the praises of our God who sits on the throne,
 and to the Lamb.

For you were among those “coming out of the great tribulation.

having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14)
 That’s you.

You make up this great multitude,

that no one could number,
 from every nook and cranny on the Earth.
 For what happens at this Altar now will be fulfilled.
 For this gathering of All the Saints around Jesus...
 this is the Church.

And you are there because you are in Christ,
 because of what He has done for you.

So, in conclusion, I say to you dear Saints of God,

Though you weep now, in mourning,
you will be comforted.
Though you struggle now to keep the faith,
yours is the kingdom of heaven!
Though you humbly make your way, often overlooked,
you will inherit the earth.
Though you long for what's right, both in the world and your own desires,
you will be satisfied.
And though persecuted today—and even worse in the days to come—
Yours is the kingdom.

Happy All Saints Day...
In the Holy Name of Jesus, Amen.

Standing...

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds—for all the saints—through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.