

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“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.”

Just about everyone, I would venture to guess, has had a shared experience that is life altering. You go to the dryer to pull out your white clothes, or you were expecting to pull out the whites. One red shirt, sock, or other little item now turned what was white into pink or shade of red. Today though you hear of those who stand before the throne of God. Their robes have been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. Sin stains but the blood of the Lamb cleanses. Being a saint is different and set apart. Jesus has washed you and made you clean, and you wear the baptismal garment which covers you with Christ and his righteousness. You are a saint now and you are a saint forever.

Listen again to those words of the first reading, “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”

That’s quite the vision God presents before you today and it’s wonderful. Here are the saints, the holy ones of God who have been redeemed by Christ. They have been cleansed by his blood and now stand in victory; they stand in life. But like St. John in the reading we ask, “Who are these people?” Today, hearing this word, Jesus says, “This is you; now and not yet.”

That’s the thing. Being a saint is being one now and not yet. It’s having this picture from the first reading and all the victory, peace, and joy that it entails. All at the same time as you look around and see, though, that you are still in this world and not yet before the throne of the Lamb. The Epistle reading speaks to this when you hear, “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”

As a Christian, God has called you his own not because you have made some decision or because you have earned it. No, God is the one who has made you, his child. He is the one who has shown his love toward you in Christ. He is the one who delivers Christ and salvation to you through the word of God and his sacraments which are physical elements connected with God’s word. This is what God has done for you in Christ who accomplished your salvation and what he has promised is yours now distributed and given out this very instant. You are God’s child; you are his saint now. God has called you his own.

So what does this mean? Being a saint now means that your sin is forgiven. Saint is the word for “holy one” and the word “holy” in the Bible has a meaning of being set apart or different. As a Christian you live in the world as one who is different than what you see and experience around you. The world thinks in a different way. It operates differently. Its culture and language are different than yours. Its god is different too. And because the world doesn’t know Christ, it can’t on its own, and because you are a child of God through faith in Christ, it doesn’t know you. Christianity is not just a foreign concept but seen as a hostile force. You and the fallen world around you are different.

But here’s the thing. Notice how quick we are to forget who we are! When we do look around us and see we are still in this world and all that it entails what do you think? Are you enticed to fit in? Are you caught up in whatever you think the world expects of you and your family? What do you see when you look around? Where is your focus? We kid ourselves and think that we can be more than just “in the world.” We think we can take things and use them in a way that we can still be known and liked by the world and still be faithful to God. We think we can be the ones who define what it means to be a saint who isn’t really that different and set apart with a different heart and mind. But where does this come from? “Spoiler alert” our sinful flesh defines it according to where we don’t listen to the word of God but are

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tossed to and fro by whatever is the current trend of the day or a life where we can remain in our sin and still think we can call ourselves saints. But that's not what God says.

The life of a saint in this world is a different life. It doesn't mean you don't participate in this world or just shut yourself off from it like the Amish. No, what it means to be a saint is a life that hears the word of God and keeps it. It's seeking first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. It's a life that follows in the way of Jesus and the way of Jesus. It's a life of dying to sin and bearing the crosses we have given for being faithful to the Lord and his word. Notice in the reading from Revelation how the saints are coming out of the great tribulation. They aren't coming out of their best life now in this world. They aren't staying in this fallen world but coming out of it. Loving and following the fallen world, the devil, and our own fallen flesh is not who a saint is. If our lives look more like what we see around us and not what God teaches us in his word, then we need to examine our lives because what God says isn't the problem.

Living as a saint is both harder and easier than it used to be. It's harder in a sense because more and more you are going to be in the minority as a saint of God who hears the word of God and actually believes it and lives it. Being faithful to God's word and not buying into what the world "knows" will cost you a great deal of opportunities, friends, and relationships with family members.

But in some ways, this is easier now than it was a few decades ago, at least in terms of what God teaches. Division has a way of letting the truth shine forth and be easier to see. The lines are no longer blurred. As a Christian now, you have God's word which is clear and doesn't change and never will. God's law is eternal and in so much of what is around us it becomes easier to separate truth from error and see the absolute ridiculousness of what the world tries to live by and preach. God's word is the lamp that shines in the darkness in all of that. Dear saints be who God has called you to be. Be faithful to his word and know that the Lord will not forsake you. He will strengthen you and keep you safe even if you go through fire. Your glory is everlasting and it's at the side of Jesus.

You are a saint now and not yet and this is precisely why you are gathered together on this day. Each time you come together around the means of grace you see this vision of heaven coming to earth. You aren't before the throne of the Lamb now, but the throne of the Lamb comes to you as you gather around word and sacrament. The divine service is your heaven on earth until the day when the earth passes away and the Lord raises you up and you are in this reading of Revelation you see before you. Yet, until that day, the Lord comes down to meet you as you hear his word and receive his Supper. You join with angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven here in this very place.

It's great that we have this today as we hear the two choirs singing not to us but like this heavenly host before the Lamb of God. Our worship service confesses this. It transcends time and space literally each time we enter the divine service. It's different than the world around us and that's good, it's supposed to be. This reflects too, the unchanging, holy, and reverent worship in heaven before the throne of God because there is only one church we are just on this side of grave. We are the saints gathered here and now and look forward to that future glory that is not yet here. But soon enough, that day will come, God promises you. And then there will be a new heaven and new earth. It will be a place with no more suffering, no more temptation and assaults of the devil, the world, and your fallen flesh. There will be no more crosses to bear only eternal joy and peace beyond all measure. That's the day when the not yet is no longer and the now as a saint becomes forever. When you are raised from your grave, and you will because Jesus has, you will be in a world that is forever holy and in God's eternal presence which will shepherd you and all the saints.

Dear saints of God, as you go through this world you have the certainty of what God promises you as he cannot lie. There is so much that you don't and can't know in terms of your physical health, financial security, and any number of things. But what you do know is most certainly true because you are known by God. God has redeemed you in Christ. He is the one who has done it and washes you clean in his blood clothing you with his righteousness. In so much that is uncertain this vision of what you see is your sure and certain hope. As saints now, this is what you have. Repent of your sin and cling to him who has done this. Don't listen to the devil, the world, and your fallen flesh which try to tear you away from Christ and his word and throw off that white garment the Lord has placed upon you in your baptism. Don't try to fit in because the world is perishing. Earlier in 1 John 2 God says, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the

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flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” Dear saints, instead rejoice in being set apart having been called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. Know that you are his child by grace alone through faith in Christ alone. He delivers this to you as he works through this means of grace; word and sacraments.

As we remember those who have gone before us from St. John’s this past year as we give thanks for the not yet they now see. It encourages us to see the confession of Christ and that in the Lord we are not apart but still together as the saints of God. See that’s the thing too as a saint. You view death differently than the world. You view the death of a Christian in view of what your Lord shows you in a reading like this. As a Christian you see the death of a Christian then of a husband, wife, sister, brother, child, or whomever as one who has the victory and life. And you share in all this now as you look to the not yet. You are both saints because of him who is the victorious lamb who by his dying he destroyed death and is raised for your justification. Your sin has been atoned for by Jesus and you have peace with God. The devil has been defeated, your sin is forgiven and death has been overcome that’s a forever now you have. Its sting is gone even though you may die now in the world you will live forever.

Know what you have now in Christ and what will be your future. You are a saint. When your sin rears its ugly head confess it and look to Christ crucified. When you are uncertain about what your life will be or how long, fix your eyes on the Lord who stood victorious outside an empty tomb where his dead body had been laid. When you mourn those, who have gone before you and died in the Christian faith, see this faithful cloud of witnesses which surrounds you and the church. And in all circumstances hear your Lord’s word and cling to his gifts for this is where he is truly present for you and delivers all this forgiveness, life, and salvation.

On this All Saints’ observance rejoice in Jesus who is the victorious Lamb who was slain. The victory has been won, and you are his children, his saints who have an eternal inheritance. “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. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” This is what is said about you, the dear saints of God for blessed are you. Yours is the Kingdom of heaven now and forever.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.