

All Saints Sunday (Year-A) The scripture text is taken from Revelation 7:9-17

Today is All Saints Sunday. This is the Sunday when we are reminded, once more, that our God is not a God of the dead, but also of the living.

Today, we recognize, that those who have died in Christ, are not dead, but alive in the presence of God. Today, we remember that Christ's Church not only includes the saints on earth, but also the saints in heaven.

So what does this mean? It means that whenever and wherever the Church gathers on this side of heaven, we see only the tiniest fraction of it!

For the saints whom we knew and loved in this life: Brenda Herr, Gladys Herr, Loraine Glenwinkel, Gene Glaesar, and Helen Schulz, who have already passed through this vale of tears and are now in God's eternal presence.

We, the saints here on earth, are in the minority. We are just a small fraction of all the Christians who have ever lived.

When we realize this, that we are, but a tiny fraction of the Church, it should not fill us with sadness, or disappointment. To the contrary, such a truth comforts us and encourages us!

For when we gather to worship, there is more here than the earthly eye can see. With the eyes of faith, we discover that, when we gather as God's people, the saints of heaven, are gathered as well!

Listen to what the writer of the Book of Hebrews tells us, starting in chapter 12, verse 22, he writes: "But that you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

So when we gather for worship, we aren't the only ones present. The angels of heaven are with us. The spirit of the righteous made perfect, are also with us, (they're the saints of heaven).

But most of all, when we worship, Christ is here. He is here with us, in His body and His blood, giving to us, His new covenant of forgiveness.

The saints in heaven are not that distant and not that far away. And by God's grace, we will one day join that triumphant victory celebration without end.

All the saints gather as one, standing before the throne of God and the Lamb, clothed in white garments, living Christ's victory, won on that blood-stained cross to it's fullness.

They (the saints) cry aloud, "We are saved by our God, who sits on the throne and by His Son, the Lamb".

Yet, others also join the saints in worshipping the Blessed Trinity: The angels, the elders, and the four living creatures surrounding the throne of God. The heavenly choir sings praises, blessings, honor and glory, to our God, now and forever.

That's the liturgy of heaven. The liturgy centers on the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. As it is in heaven, so it is on earth.

Christian worship centers on Jesus Christ. Here, on earth, Jesus is present to bless us with His words of pardon and peace.

Born of the Virgin Mary, Christ is here with us, in His body and His blood, to give us His forgiveness of sins, abundant life and the promise of salvation.

Worship, as it is supposed to be, points us away from ourselves and our own interests, and points us to Christ, and what He has done for us, out of a love that is great and wide, and knows no end.

The liturgy does not belong to us, but to the Triune God. That's why worship is called the "Divine Service". It's God's service to us, through His Word and Sacraments.

Salvation belongs to our God, and that is what He gives us here, in His Word and Sacraments. We do not come here to be entertained, but to be edified.

This morning as we worship, we come here to be strengthened and affirmed in the faith. We remember the saints who have gone before us, we give thanks for their lives, for their witness and for the example they have given us to live in faith, each and every day.

In this scripture reading from the Book of Revelation, in verse 13, St. John writes: "Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?' I said to him, 'Sir, you are the one that knows.' Then he said to me, 'These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'"

These are people like me and you. They have had their share of life's pains and problems. At times, life has beaten them down, but they did not give up. They struggled day by day, hanging on when things seemed hopeless. They are people for whom faith did not come easy, hoping and praying to make it across the finish-line of this race called, "life".

They are people who struggled to trust in God, to believe, even when their many troubles told them otherwise. By faith, they knew that God was still in control, that He still loved them, was still forgiving them, and still keeping them in the faith.

For us today, we are not living the reality that St. John saw, as he was taken into heaven, as God pulled back the curtain of time, to give him a glimpse of the End-Time and of the future glory to come.

The reality is, we are the, "Church Militant", meaning that, we continue our struggle in this present world, awaiting our deliverance from this earthly life, awaiting the day of Christ's return in power and in glory.

But the Church in heaven and the Church on earth, are not two different churches. We are One Church, One Communion, One Body.

It is indeed, as we sing in the hymn on page 165 of the LBW, "Holy, Holy, Holy," in the second stanza, we sing: "All the saints adore thee". That means all saints in heaven and on earth.

The "great ordeal" mentioned in the Book of Revelation, is the life of the Christian under the cross of Christ. All Christians have, or will experience this.

Such distress becomes real, when the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh, assault and attack us. Temptation and failure, doubt and frustration, afflicts all Christians, no believer is immune from it.

The saints around the throne of God have no self-made holiness. Their holiness is the same as ours: The blood of Jesus Christ which cleanses us from all sin.

The Saints wear the pure-white robe of Christ's righteousness, which covers their shame and wraps them in His forgiveness.

It is only through the righteousness of Christ, that they can delight in the eternal presence of the living God.

Yes, "we feebly struggle, they in glory shine". But like them, we are saints. We are saints because of the cleansing blood of the Lamb, who has also washed their sins away, has also cleansed ours, as well.

The white robe of Christ's righteousness that clothes them is also our white robe given to us in our baptism, when we were baptized into the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are one with the saints in heaven, because we are one with our Lord Jesus Christ.

In heaven with the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs, and the confessors of the faith, there is also the multitude of ordinary Christians, who have lived and died in the faith throughout the ages of every time and every place. We may not know them by name, but God does, for they lived and died trusting in Christ Jesus, as Lord of lords and King of kings.

All Saints Sunday gives us a glimpse into that unseen reality of the Church Triumphant. The Church here on earth lives in this reality, knowing what awaits us, is already ours, even if we do not yet experience it. This is why, we walk by faith and not by sight.

And, at the center of it all, is the Lamb. On earth, in this place, the Lord's Supper is the center of it all, Christ's Body and Blood, washes you clean from your sins. It is the total work of God. This is God's grace given to you, as a gift.

And so here, the saints, on earth, covered in the blood-washed robes of Christ, gather with the saints of heaven, around God's eternal throne, to sing His praises, while you and I are here on earth, we can't be any nearer to the saints in heaven, than here in His Supper.

The future world is here, although it is hidden from our eyes, it is still present. One day, (and only God knows of that day and hour) you and I will see it in its full splendor. Then you and I will shine with Christ's glory, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit, we will sing praises to, not only in this world, but in the world to come. Amen.

Let us pray:

Eternal God, We give You thanks praise for all of your saints, who have lived in the faith and who have died in the faith and now stand before You in your eternal kingdom. Because of our sinfulness, we do not deserve to stand before you. Yet, by your grace, through faith in your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, we can and will stand before You in heaven, because of His atoning work on the cross, and by His resurrection over sin and death. Help us in our daily living, and in our struggles to see, that heaven is our

home, and that our life in this world, is to prepare us, for life with you in your kingdom. All these things we humbly pray in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.