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Christ the King & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Cody & Powell, WY

The Feast of All Saints' - Observed

November 5, 2023

Text: Revelation 7:9–17

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

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (I John 3:1).

Dear saints of God, God’s Word declares that you are children of God the Father right now, at this very moment in time. This present tense blessing is evidence of the Father’s love and mercy. We haven’t earned the right to be God’s children. Our adoption into God’s family is one of extraordinary grace and profound love.

As God’s children, we are united together with each other in bonds of love and fellowship that transcends life, death, things present, things to come, height, depth, and all things in heaven and on earth. Each year on All Saints’ Sunday, we pause to remember and give thanks especially for those who have died in the faith since All Saints’ Sunday a year ago. Their lives are a continual testimony that death is a defeated foe. Every Christian who has died in the faith has ascended unto God in heaven where they rest from their labors and rejoice in the eternal joy and peace of our saving Lord. They are children of God, living and enjoying God’s eternal life.

We get a glimpse of the saints’ eternal life in Revelation chapter 7:9–17, the first reading for today. We see in this passage of Scripture, God’s children are gathered around the heavenly throne in worship, praise, and eternal joy. This heavenly liturgy is centered around Jesus, the Lamb of God who took away all sin and evil by His crucifixion and who destroyed Death by rising from the dead.

In this text, God's children are participating in the on-going life of Jesus as given to them by God the Father through the mighty power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus stands front and center in the heavenly liturgy. For He is standing in the very midst of the throne (Rev. 7:17) surrounded by the redeemed from every nation, tribes, people, and languages (Rev. 7:9). Every race, every ethnicity from every time and place in human history is found in the heavenly liturgy. This is the universality of the Christian Gospel and the unity of God's family, the one, holy, Christian and apostolic Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This one family shares in the family characteristics. According to vs. 9–10, they wear the same clothing, all have palm branches, and all sing the same song of redemption. All the redeemed are clothed in white robes which represents the righteousness of the saints given to them by the Christ our dear Lord. St. Paul, in Galatians 3:27 declares, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." All Christians have been clothed in the wholesome righteousness of Jesus given through baptism and saving faith in Him.

And these saints wave palm branches during this heavenly liturgy. Palm branches are symbols of symbols of triumph and victory. On Palm Sunday, Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem while crowds waved palm branched in joyful celebration. The redeemed of the Lord sing the song of redemption in harmonious unity, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" To this great stanza of praise, all the heavenly hosts responds in majestic antiphony, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." (Rev. 7:12).

In Revelation chapter 7, God's Lamb is worshipped and adored by the white clad multitudes waving palm branches. This Lamb, Jesus Christ, is the King. His kingdom and His people are established upon His crucifixion and resurrection. The very robes worn by heaven's multitudes are made white by His holy, precious blood shed on the cross. Preaching, baptism, confession and absolution, and the Lord's Supper are the Father's ordained means by

which His people participate in the crucifixion and resurrection of His beloved Son through faith. The Holy Spirit uses these means of grace to create and sustain Christian faith. They are the particular treasures of the Church. Week after week, year after year we gather in this place around Scripture, preaching, prayer, and the Holy Sacraments. Our worship here in time reflects and mimics the worship taking place in eternity!

But there is a question raised in this heavenly vision by one of the 24 elders, one the heavenly hosts surrounding God's throne. "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" (vs. 13). John responds by saying, "Sir, you know" (vs. 14). The vision is so overwhelming and glorious, John is almost left speechless!

The elder informs John that the white robed multitudes are the "ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (vs. 14). These are the blessed ones spoken of by our Lord in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5. The heavenly multitudes are those who recognized their own spiritual poverty. Those who mourned over their sin. Those who were reviled, persecuted, and slandered for the sake of the Lord Jesus and His Gospel. And now, they see God and His Lamb and are thereby satisfied in God's righteousness and holiness.

The great tribulation mentioned by the heavenly elder isn't some future time period. It's the present life of every baptized Christian. On this side of eternity, the Church militant struggles against every form of evil. Though we are God's children now, we live in the Church under the cross of Jesus. This is the present age where the devil, the world, and on our flesh press in on us to destroy our Christian faith. For they do not want us to hallow God's name or let Christ's kingdom come among us. The author of the book of Hebrews exhorted the Hebrew Christians to forsake not the assembling of themselves. Instead, Christians living in the Church militant regularly and faithfully gather in worship around God's Word, Sacrament, prayers, and praises in order to encourage one another in love unto good works (Heb. 10:24-25). Being a Christian is hard. We need one another.

Dear people of God, I know that all of us get tired and weary of the trials each of face in daily lives. But today, in this sanctuary of God's grace, be encouraged and renewed in the strength of our risen Lord and Savior. Your strength and your holiness, are found in the undying, undiminished majesty of Christ Jesus. You are God's children now and will remain so in eternity. For Jesus conquered death and hell on your behalf. These days of tribulation may get worse, or they may lighten. It does not matter. Christ Jesus rose from the dead. And so we stand in the face of trial and tribulation with our heads held high proclaiming to the world. Christ is risen! To the rise and fall of rulers, princes, and countries we say, "Christ is risen!" To all opponents of Christian faith and godliness, to the devil himself we say, "Christ is risen!" Good Friday and Easter changed everything in heaven and earth. Our indomitable confidence is found in this Lord Jesus who died and rose again and rules and reigns over heaven and earth from the throne of God.

Here in this holy place, we are surrounded by white-robed multitudes from every tribe, nation, people, and language. Such is our firm conviction because Christ is here. And where Christ is present, His saints, past and present are gathered together. In the liturgy of the Lord's Supper we confess these marvelous words, "Therefore with angels and archangels and with *all the company of heaven* we laud and magnify Your glorious name..." And so we believe our loved ones who have died in the faith are here with us for they are members of "all the company of heaven."

There is no more dynamic, wonder-filled place than the Christian divine service. The angels and all the heavenly hosts are here. God the Holy Trinity fills this sanctuary with His holiness, mercy, and love. How awesome is this place. Through faith in Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we join the saints in heaven in declaring before heaven and earth, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev. 7:10). This is true because Jesus gathers His people from all times and places and unites them together through His blood. The one, holy Christian and apostolic Church is the world's true and lasting hope. In this blessed communion, all Christians

find joy and peace. In the Church there is life in absolute fullness. For Christ is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity.

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (I John 3:1).

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

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.