

The Feast of All Saints
Service of Daily Prayer -- Morning
November 1, 2020

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

P: In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice;

C: **In the morning I prepare a sacrifice for You and watch.**

Psalm 5:3

P: My mouth is filled with Your praise,

C: **and with Your glory all the day.**

Psalm 71:8

P: O Lord, open my lips,

C: **and my mouth will declare Your praise.**

Psalm 51:15

All: **Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

Scripture Readings

Revelation 7:9-17

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!" And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "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.

"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."

1 John 1:1-3

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.

Matthew 5:1-12

And [Jesus] opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Hymn: *LSB 585, Lord Jesus Christ, with Us Abide*



1 Lord Je - sus Christ, with us a - bide, For round us
2 In these last days of great dis - tress Grant us, dear
3 To hope grown dim, to hearts turned cold Speak tongues of
4 May glo - rious truths that we have heard, The bright sword



falls the e - ven - tide. O let Your Word,
Lord, true stead - fast - ness That we keep pure
fire and make us bold To shine Your Word
of Your might - y Word, Spurn Sa - tan that



that sav - ing light, Shine forth un - dimmed in - to the night.
till life is spent Your ho - ly Word and Sac - ra - ment.
of sav - ing grace In - to each dark and love - less place.
Your Church be strong, Bold, u - ni - fied in act and song.

5 Restrain, O Lord, the human pride
That seeks to thrust Your truth aside
Or with some man-made thoughts or things
Would dim the words Your Spirit sings.

6 Stay with us, Lord, and keep us true;
Preserve our faith our whole life through—
Your Word alone our heart's defense,
The Church's glorious confidence.

Sermon

What does heaven look like? What do you see when you imagine heaven? Is it like you see in cartoons, clouds floating around and angels playing harps softly in the background? Some large pearly gates, with an old guy in white robe standing out front with a name tag that says “Saint Peter”? Or perhaps it's a lot like your favorite place in the world – a golf course, a home, a certain city

or place you know and love. Personally, for me, heaven might look something the Smokey Mountains, or like the mountains and lakes of Switzerland, some of the most beautiful places I've seen.

This morning we heard a portion of this vision that the apostle John had very late in his life. He was a young man when Jesus called him and his brother away from their fishing in Galilee. In his youth, he followed Jesus, hearing him teach and do miracles; he saw Jesus in glory at his Transfiguration on the mountain and in agony in the garden of Gethsemane. He was there at what seemed like the end, standing at the foot of the cross with Jesus' mother. He was there at the empty tomb; witnessed the risen Christ and saw him ascend into heaven. And decades later he saw a glimpse of that heaven. After a long, hard lifetime spent in the service of the Gospel, while exiled on a small island in the Aegean Sea, God gave him the vision that he wrote down in this book we call Revelation.

And in this description which we read from, what does heaven look like? Well, he doesn't really tell us what it looks like. He doesn't give us much of those details at all – its physical appearance, where it is, things like that which we might be very interested in. What's much more important is *who* is there. Heaven isn't pictured so much as a physical location as it is a situation – the group that's gathered there. Because, most importantly, God is there. He is there at the center of all things, and that's what makes heaven heavenly. And who else is there with Him? A great number of angels, and a great number of people – His people, "a great multitude that no one could number". What we see is the relationship between God and His people fully restored, the Church and her Savior reunited at last as things are meant to be. God and Man are there together in perfect harmony, as His people sing His praises forever.

So, who are these people that are there? That's the question in the text, too. "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." Maybe, out of the countless multitude, John could recognize a few of them here or there – his fellow apostles who had already given their lives in service of the Gospel, Peter, Paul, Matthew, Andrew, his own brother James.

If we were given the same vision that John had, perhaps we could also recognize a few faces here and there, people we've known in this life. One of the things we do this Sunday is what we call the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed, remembering those we love who have gone before us in faith to be with God. If we looked closely enough at that countless multitude, we could see their faces, too. And we know our current separation from them is not a permanent thing, because we too will join in that great gathering. Those present there are the ones coming out of the great tribulation, coming out of their time on this earth spent under constant attack and temptation by all our enemies.

Death is the cause of our remembrance on All Saints' Day, the consequence because we have each sinned against God. We rejected our Creator, disobeyed Him, treated both Him and our fellow human beings shamefully. This year, more than just about any in recent history, has served to remind us of the inescapable fact of death. Faced with a global pandemic of a new and mysterious disease, many people have been isolated at home out of fear for their safety. We're bombarded in the news with the statistics: over a million deaths around the world, hundreds of thousands of them in our country. We all personally know people who have been sick; we know one of our own members who

was taken by it. This year has been for many Americans what Medieval people would have called a *memento mori*, a reminder that mortality is inevitable.

But death has lost its sting, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians; only the outward form remains, though we have to acknowledge that even that is bad enough and it might not feel like the sting is gone. Yet the fundamental promise of the Gospel is that death has been defeated, the eternal consequence of sin has been totally undone; not defeated by you, but by the victory of Christ, the Lamb on his eternal throne. By the blood of Christ, each and every one those sins are forgiven and forgotten, wiped away as you were washed clean in your baptism and made a part of the Body of Christ.

We, along with all these saints in heaven, have washed our robes in the blood of the Lamb. And instead of coming out soaked red with that blood, it has made them a dazzlingly bright white, as we have been forgiven and purified by the mercy and power of God. The Lamb who was slain has begun his eternal reign, and having shed his holy blood for us, he will be our shepherd. And wiping away every tear, he will lead us to the springs of living water, from which he promises we will drink and never be thirsty again.

Though for now we are in two different places, on earth or in heaven, there is only one universal Church, the gathering of all believers. We are currently suffering a temporary separation, but All Saints' Day is a reminder that it is, in fact, only temporary. The book of Hebrews talks about the Christian Church as "the Church in a foreign land" versus the "Church in the homeland." We are the ones in the foreign country, the green card holders who live in the world but hold citizenship in God's kingdom; the Faithful Departed we remember today have emigrated back to the homeland. We are struggling in this life, against sin and temptation and hardships; still in the thick of that great tribulation. They have, as Scripture puts it, finished the race and are at peace with Christ, enjoying that rest that God gives in His presence. When we remember them, especially when we remember them together as the Church on this day each year, it is not to continue mourning and grieving for them; it is to give thanks to God for His care for them.

We are reminded that, despite this current separation, we are still one Church. Some people talk about heaven as if the whole point was being reunited with those we love; that's not true, the primary point is healing the division between us and God, and dwelling in His presence forever. It's more about God than about us. But nevertheless, a reunion with fellow believers is also a part of it. This is the "communion of saints" we confess in the words of the Creed. Is that one of those phrases we say in the Creed that you don't really pay much attention to? The Church, the Body of Christ, is not cut in half, with half left here and half up in heaven. Ephesians reminds us that we are one Body, as we share one faith and one God, saved through one baptism, in which each of us were made dazzlingly white in the blood of the Lamb. Though we still struggle while they do not, we are one Church with them. The Church is separated, but it is still united.

The final reminder is that we already enter into heaven, in a way: you already know the merciful presence of God, by grace through faith. One day we will see it in all its fullness, but even now God gives us a taste of it. We have the forgiveness of our sins, and the peace with God that brings. We have blessings now and the promises of blessings still to come. We have the hope of the resurrection, the certainty of things yet unseen. And we have his gracious presence even now – in his words, "I am with you always."

Even now, we have a foretaste of it. When we gather at the rail and kneel to receive Christ's body and blood, we are a part of that great communion of the saints – that community of heaven. It's as if all the saints in heaven are here with us, or that we are there with them, praising and thanking the God who has brought us salvation. Many pastors in the early Church talked about the Lord's Supper as a time when the lines between heaven and earth were blurred: it is not just a time when each person has a communion with Jesus, but also with each other, when the whole Church at every time and every place is united to praise God and receive God's gifts. Our own liturgy reminds us, "with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven..."

All Saints' Day is a day to remember those who have departed this world, from whom we are separated for a little while. As long as this separation continues, there will be sadness. But we do not mourn in despair like those who have no hope; rather, today is a day not only to remember but also to rejoice along with those who have joined the everlasting company, the great multitude in the eternal presence of God. All saints – all holy people, made clean by the Lamb's holy blood; here, there and everywhere – all who continuously praise the Holy One, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – that unity of all God's saints is what we are celebrating.

Today we see these images and visions of the glories of heaven – the state of being with God, in His presence and His mercy, dwelling with His people forever. We thank Him for the promise of glories still to come, and for the present blessings He so richly reveals to us. We thank Him for all the saints who now rest from all their labors, in peace with Him. And we pray for the grace to remain in that great company here in life and there for eternity.

Apostles' Creed

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.
And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
Born of the virgin Mary,
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day He rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
And sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

**Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth**

as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For Thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.

Prayers

- P: In joyful expectation of the resurrection to life eternal, we remember before the Lord our departed family and friends who have gone before us in faith and all those who are in our hearts and minds this day. Let us pray.
Almighty God, we remember with thanksgiving those who loved and served You in Your Church on earth and who now rest from their labors. Keep us in fellowship with all Your saints, and bring us at last to the joy of Your heavenly kingdom; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C: **Amen.**
- C: **Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.**

Prayers for the Church, our community and nation, the sick, etc.

- P: Almighty and everlasting God, You knit together Your faithful people of all times and places into one holy communion, the mystical body of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Grant us so to follow Your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living that, together with them, we may come to the unspeakable joys You have prepared for those who love You; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
- C: **Amen.**
- All: **I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.**

- P: Let us bless the Lord!
- C: **Thanks be to God!**
- P: The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.
- C: **Amen.**