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All Saints' Day
November 2, 2025
Text: Revelation 7:2 – 4 & 9 – 17
Title: One Of The Crowd

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. One of the jobs that I had while attending Concordia Seminary in St. Louis was at the St. Louis Blues Hockey Arena, at the time it was officially named *The Savvis Center*. I was part of the event security staff there, and our main job was crowd control. For the most part it was a great job, especially during hockey games, because the section that I was assigned to for those events was inside the arena itself, and during most games I was essentially paid to watch professional hockey while making sure that no one went past me who didn't belong on the level above my post. For other events, such as concerts or family shows, I could be assigned to any number of other jobs in the building, but the work was still the same, crowd control and safety.

Whatever the event was though, there was always one important piece of information that the security staff needed to know, and that was how many people were expected to attend. A sold out crowd could number anywhere from 18,000 to 22,000 people depending on the size of a stage or how the arena was set up or any one of a number of other factors, but that number was important to us because we needed to be prepared for how many people we would have to handle inside of our building. Obviously a larger crowd meant that we would probably have more work, but a smaller event didn't necessarily mean an easy night either. That number was always good information to have though just so that we could mentally prepare for what was to come.

Large crowds are a typical part of our culture in 21st century America. College and professional sports teams are always looking for more ways to give more people live access to their events so that they can bring in more money and set records for attendance. Even legendary

venues like Lambeau Field and Soldier Field either have expanded their seating to allow more fans to attend games and bring in more money. The whole purpose for any arena renovation is to permit larger and larger crowds, and, of course, on New Year's Eve everyone will be able to watch millions of people crowded together in New York's famous Times Square celebration.

Crowds are a common site in today's world, and with the bigger and bigger crowds has come the desire to determine just how many people are present at any given event. Sometimes the information is desired just to satisfy curiosity, but it can also be to keep accurate information for financial or historical records. The science of trying to guess how many people are present at any one time has gotten pretty sophisticated at some events because there is money involved. Many arenas use a ticket scanning system that counts every person who comes through the gate so that the count is far more accurate than it ever was from counting ticket stubs by hand, and people can move into the building quicker than ever. Mathematicians and statisticians have figured out methods of estimating the size of larger crowds by counting the number of people in a given area and plugging that number into a mathematical formula. This gives them a reasonable guess of how many people are in attendance in a given crowd.

In the Bible, crowds are found in any number of places, from the massive number of people who left Egypt in the Exodus to the crowd of 5,000 men plus women and children that were fed by Jesus in the Gospels. The first days of the Christian Church saw large groups of people being converted such as the 3,000 who were given faith after Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost. But of all the crowds that we see in the Scriptures and even the massive crowds that we see today, none comes anywhere close to what St. John is shown in the seventh chapter of Revelation, our first reading for today.

In the first half of chapter seven, John is shown a vision of four angels with the power to harm the earth and the sea, but they are told to wait until the servants of God are sealed on their forehead. And John is told that the number of those to be sealed will be 144,000, or 12 times 12,000. That number represents the entire church on earth as it stands ready to do its mission in the world. But in the second part of this chapter – which today’s reading focuses on – the vision that John is being granted changes back to the heavenly throne room once again.

Starting in verse nine, the apostle describes what he is seeing with these words, “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.’”

After seeing the group of 144,000 people representing the church on earth, John now sees a crowd that is so vast that no one can count it. It isn’t a collection made up of a single race, but of every nation, every tribe, every people and every language throughout all of history. All of these people are dressed in white robes and carrying in their hands the symbol of victory, a palm branch, and they have suddenly appeared in the heavenly throne room standing before the very throne of God and the Lamb. This uncountable assembly adds to the eternal praises of God with words that are very familiar to us since we sang a version of them just a little while ago in our Hymn of Praise, “This Is The Feast.”

Suddenly, an elder asks St. John who this vast crowd is, and when John isn't able to give an answer then the elder does. "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..." This crowd, this multitude, is the assembly of all the faithful people who have been given salvation throughout the world and throughout all of history. These are the saints of God who we remember and give thanks for on this All Saints' Day. This vast number of the saints who we remember and give thanks for spans from the faithful believers in the Old Testament; to the ranks of the martyrs and the heroes of the faith throughout history; to the Reformers who began what we call the Lutheran Church; to the Christian friends and family members that each of us has lost during the relatively short period of our own lives.

All of them have been delivered from their sinful existence so full of pain and suffering, and even as we remember with thanks the lives of faith that these saints have lived, we do so as we remain in this sinful world that they have left. And in our sin, we will turn to any number of false beliefs to make death seem less frightening and to help us ignore or deny the pain that it causes us. We might cling to the world's assertion that death is a natural part of life, but if it's so natural then why is it so terrifying? Many might turn to the old Hollywood favorite that people who die and go to heaven become angels, and they are somehow watching over us right now. But if that is the case, why does this reading distinguish between the angels and the great multitude that is before the throne? A third way that people try to deny or at least lessen the pain of death is to try and turn it into a celebration. This view can almost make a person feel guilty for mourning the death of a person that they have loved, and can even give the false impression that Christians aren't supposed to be sad at a funeral. But our Lord gives us permission to mourn

the death of a friend or family member just as He wept at the death of His dear friend, Lazarus. If death is a reason to celebrate, why did Jesus have to go to such great lengths to destroy it?

In spite of how well-meaning these false teachings might be, they take our focus away from the real source of comfort that God has given to us, the promise of everlasting life that has been bought and paid for by the blood of the Lamb of God. It is because the blood of the Lamb has made them pure that the saints have received the fulfillment of the promise that the elder described to John. He tells us that the saints, "...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."

Death is one of the three greatest enemies of all humanity along with sin and the power of the devil, but death has been forever defeated by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. Because of His victory, we live a life in faith that is already forgiven, already everlasting, and already counted among the very same saints that John saw in his great Revelation and that we thank God for here today. That is why we can proclaim in every celebration of the Lord's Supper that we do so "...with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven." As a part of that great heavenly host, you and I will receive the very same blessings that the saints are enjoying even now. We will no longer hunger or thirst. We won't experience any suffering from dangerous weather like hurricanes or other natural causes. The Lamb Himself will guide us to the springs of Living Water that will sustain us, and God Himself will wipe away every tear from your eyes. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.