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All Saints' Day
November 6, 2022
Text: LSB #677 & Revelation 7:2 – 17
Title: For All the Saints

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. There are certain festivals in the yearly cycle of the church that are never passed over no matter what day of the week they might fall on. Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are always celebrated even if they fall in the middle of the week. All of the services of Holy Week are always celebrated ending on Easter Sunday with the great and joyful celebration of our Lord's Resurrection. But some festivals are typically celebrated only when they fall on a Sunday. This past year we didn't celebrate St. Michael & All Angels Day on September 29th because it fell on a Thursday, but if it had been on a Sunday, we would have observed it as part of our worship. But today we observe All Saints' Day, even though its specific day is November 1st. All Saints' Day is a festival that most Lutheran churches celebrate every year regardless of what day of the week it falls on, because it has such a central focus to our Christian life.

This is the day of the year that we give thanks to God for all of the Christians who we have known who have been called to their eternal rest. Many of us have lost friends and family members over the years who were connected to the body of Christ in this or in another congregation, and today's festival of All Saints' Day is when we take the time to remember and give thanks to God for these fellow Christians. We thank Him for the blessing that they were to us, and for the Christian faith that they were blessed with during their earthly lives.

These brothers and sisters in Christ have gone to their heavenly home before us. Their work on this earth is done, and they now know a rest better than anything that we can ever know while we remain here. We just sang the traditional Hymn of the Day for this annual festival,

“For All the Saints,” and as you heard, it gives us a great description of the joy and peace of those who have gone to glory before us. But in today’s sermon we’re going to look at this joyous and glorious text a little closer. It’s easy to miss the rich, deep meaning of the lyrics while you’re trying to concentrate on singing the music correctly, so I invite you to open up your hymnals to #677 and take a closer look at the words of stanzas 1 and 2 as I read through them:

1. For all the saints who from their labors rest,
Who Thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest. Alleluia! Alleluia!

2. Thou wast their rock, their fortress, and their might;
Thou, Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight;
Thou, in the darkness drear, their one true light. Alleluia! Alleluia!

The first stanza sets the crucial focus for the rest of this great hymn. That very first line talks about all of the saints who rest from their labors. It wasn’t until sin entered the world that work became something that wore people down. God cursed man’s labor as part of the punishment for sin, and now true rest for faithful Christians only comes at death. Until then we work hard and long to receive little in return. When the Lord placed this curse on Adam He said to him, “...cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground...” And so throughout our life, we work and sweat to earn a living, and there is no true rest until our life ends.

It’s the second line of the hymn that gives us the reason that rest is finally granted to the Lord’s saints, and that reason is faith. By faith, the saints confessed the name of Jesus before the world, and His is a name that is forever blessed or praised. Without the faith that is mentioned here, there would be no true rest for anyone. There would be no saints, and the Lord’s name

would only be praised by the typically silent parts of creation. But in His grace and mercy the Lord gives us the precious gift of faith, and by that faith He makes all believers His saints.

It's in the second stanza that the hymn describes what the Lord does for His saints. He is their rock, their fortress, and their might. In the fights of life against sin, death and the devil He is our captain, and He is our champion that protects us from those same bitter enemies. And finally, the Lord is our truest Light who overcomes the dreary darkness of this sinful world.

The next two stanzas, 3 and 4, continue the idea of the Lord as our captain:

3. Oh, may Thy soldiers, faithful, true, and bold,
Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old
And win with them the victor's crown of gold! Alleluia! Alleluia!

4. Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine. Alleluia! Alleluia!

The third stanza switches focus to those of us who are left here in this life to continue the fight against our greatest enemies: sin, death and the power of the devil. We are the Lord's soldiers, and the writer of the hymn, William How, offers up a prayer for us to remain faithful, true and bold as we continue the fight. The prayer continues to ask that we may fight in the same noble tradition that the saints who have gone before us fought in. As Paul wrote to Timothy, they fought the good fight, and they were rewarded by the Lord with the victor's crown of gold.

In today's reading from Revelation 7, there is a great multitude of saints that John has a vision of, and they are said to have come out of the great tribulation or trial. The great tribulation is especially the times of persecution against the Christian Church, and in these stanzas we are asking the Lord to see us through to the end of these times of suffering and trial. The last part of this reading describes the multitude of saints wearing white robes that have been cleaned in the blood of the Lamb of God. These saints sing the praises of the Lamb, and John is

shown that, "...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."

In the fourth stanza, our connection to the throne room of heaven is described. It occurs in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The hymn talks about it as being a divine fellowship, and as we struggle and while the saints are shining in glory, we are all one in the divine fellowship of Holy Communion with "all of the company of heaven." Living or dead, we Christian saints are all made one in Christ because we are all His own, and as we celebrate Communion today heaven will once again meet earth in His Sacrament.

The next two stanzas are 5 and 6:

5. And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong. Alleluia! Alleluia!

6. The golden evening brightens in the west;
Soon, soon to faithful warriors cometh rest;
Sweet is the calm of paradise the blest. Alleluia! Alleluia!

These two stanzas talk of the end of the struggle for the faithful warriors. The fighting may be fierce with no end in sight, but the triumphant song from heaven can be heard in the distance. The sound of it is enough to strengthen all of us weary Christian warriors to continue each day's struggles against the tribulations of this world. And as the sixth stanza declares, the time is short for us all. Each person's rest is coming sooner than we ever expect, and we never really know if the end will be 5 years from today or 5 days. But in the end it doesn't matter because the paradise that awaits us is sweet and calm with no more tears as Revelation 7 says.

The final two stanzas of the hymn look to our time in heaven and beyond.

7. But, lo, there breaks a yet more glorious day:
The saints triumphant rise in bright array;
The King of Glory passes on His way., Alleluia! Alleluia!

8. From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
Singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost: Alleluia! Alleluia!

An even more glorious day arrives at the end of the hymn. The end of time or Judgment Day is being described here, and the triumphant saints already in heaven rise up in honor of the King of Glory's passing. He is returning to the world to call His remaining saints to their promised heavenly home. The promised rest that each of us is waiting for has finally come as Christ returns to Judge the saints and the unbelievers who have fought against Him.

And finally, the last stanza – which is a doxological or praise stanza to the Trinity – describes the Lord's faithful saints from every nation around the world entering into the gates of pearl in the new creation. The number of these saints entering paradise is countless, and we will all be singing the Alleluia praises to our Lord God. In just a short amount of time we, as the body of Christ in this place, will continue the celebration of "fellowship divine" as we once again join together in receiving Christ's body and blood with "...all of the company of heaven" in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. And even though we can't see or hear them here, we will once again be reunited with friends and family who have gone to their eternal rest, and we will add our voices to the praises of all the saints, singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen.