


The Feast of All Saints  
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✠ Jesu juva ✠

OUR COMFORT, OUR HOPE, OUR PLACE  
Deuteronomy 33:1-3, Revelation 7:9-17, Matthew 5:1-12

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

oday we begin our approach toward the end of the Church Year and a consideration of the end of time. It has been said that this is the time of year when time itself grows thin. The days are shortening and getting colder. The weather is turning grim; the leaves are mostly fallen; and we know that winter is near. And we see in these seasonal changes portents of the end. These thin, darker days are lightened by the celebration of the Feast of All Saints; for in this Feast we can find comfort and hope.

And why is that? Because today we celebrate all of those who have passed from this dark world to the heavenly realm of eternal light. This day is a celebration of all who have died in the Faith and therefore are not dead, but live in Christ. It is a celebration of these holy ones who confessed Christ on earth and are now confessed by Him before the Father. And this designation of saints is not limited to the ones we consider great, like St. Augustine or St. Polycarp, or St. Cecelia, or Martin Luther, and the like, but is given to all of those souls that now dwell with Christ by His grace. Unlike the Roman church we do not separate the celebration of All Saints from All Souls, for all of the souls in heaven are now considered saints, regardless of how greatly or lightly we esteem them here on earth.

After all, if we take the Beatitudes seriously, we will find that none of those we call saints, from the greatest to the least of them, lived lives as described here. While they each might have reflected one or two of the conditions of the blessed, they did not exhibit all of them, or at least not all the time. And if we take the great commandments of God seriously, that to be truly holy or saintly we are to love God above all things and our neighbors as ourselves all of the time in an unflinching way, we see that none have done so. There is only one, therefore, who truly deserves the title of saint or holy one, and that is the Holy One of Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ became meek and poor for us, humbling Himself to come down out of heaven and take on the poverty of our flesh, and meekly living as one of us, the Creator among His creatures, His eternal glory restrained and hidden from us. He was pure in heart, never falling to temptation though, as Hebrews tells us, He "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." Christ was hungry and thirsty for righteousness, not for Himself, for He is God's righteousness, but for our righteousness; and so He gave Himself up to make us righteous and in doing so

took on Himself all of our sin and mourning and was reviled and persecuted for us, even to the point of death on the cross. But He has also received comfort and reward and blessing and victory and cause for rejoicing, for He overcame the bonds of sin and death and rose again to life the third day. And all of this He does for love of God and for love of us. He is the only man that deserves to be called a true Saint.

But what of the tens of thousands of saints spoken of by Moses, or of the innumerable multitude seen by John in His heavenly vision? If Christ is the only true Saint, then, as the elder asked St. John, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" St. John, of course, could not answer; but the elder that spoke to him explained: "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." These are the saints who have been clothed with the righteousness of Christ; whose robes have been laundered in the blood of Christ by means of the sacrament of Baptism. The ancient church had a tradition of clothing each newly baptized person (they were baptized naked) in a new, clean, white garment. Once clothed, they were then ushered into the church for the Communion Feast. By means of baptism they were made clean and gained their entrance into the heavenly banquet. They had become members of that innumerable multitude St. John saw in his apocalyptic vision of heaven.

Here is our comfort; for all of those Christians who have died, who in this life had received and faithfully kept the garment of Christ's righteousness given them in baptism are now with Christ as part of that multitude. And as St. John reports: "they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

This is also our hope. For all of us who have been baptized and have believed on Christ Jesus, trusting in His grace and mercy, are promised a place in that great heavenly assembly when we at last come to the end of this mortal life. And the blessings of God's presence, of safety, of the removal of tears and sorrow, and of eternal joy will be ours through Christ, who has loved us, saved us, and clothed us with His holiness.

This is not only our hope, however; it is already our place. True, we do not yet experience the bliss of heaven; but our place there is already prepared; for if we are in Christ, we have a place in that heavenly assembly of the saints. The true Church, on earth after all, is one with the Church in heaven. We have one Lord, one faith, and one Baptism. And the robes they wear have already been given us, washed white in the blood of the lamb by this Sacrament all true Christians receive.

Today we witnessed another child, Emory, being clothed with Christ's holiness. His young robe has been washed white now in Christ's blood. His sins have been removed. His old nature has been put down and he has been made new. He is now a little saint as much as anyone is, and has his place among the multitude of holy ones with the palm branches of victory in their hands.

This reality of which I speak today is captured very nicely in the Church's Evening Prayer service. In the litany prayers toward the end of this liturgy we are bid to pray "Rejoicing in the fellowship of all the saints, let us commend ourselves, one another, and our whole life to Christ our Lord." And in today's service we will shortly be reminded that we are gathered with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven as we come to dine on Christ at His heavenly banquet of Holy Communion. And here, wearing our baptismal robes and approaching in our baptismal faith, our holiness is renewed and refreshed, for here there is forgiveness of sins, life and salvation; and a foretaste of the heavenly feast. Indeed by the grace of Christ, even now we are granted a place among the saints, for truly it is not by our holiness or by theirs that we or they gain a place; but "salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" Amen.

✠ Soli Deo gloria ✠