

All Saints Day – 2020

Revelation 7:2-17

1 John 3:1-3

Matthew 5:1-12

This morning God gives you a look at your future. You are blessed to receive such a vision. Later in this service the names of those of our company who died in the faith this year will be read. I will recite their names and a chime will sound. For some the sound will be quite painful. Loss is painful. We read the names of our beloved dead on this day and we pair it with the reading from the book of Revelation. That is our future. The reading from Revelation is a vivid reminder of our true home. As the chime drifts after each name, our minds fly to them being home, being supremely themselves, perfect and holy and home. Christ is there. On His throne, Christ is there with His life, with His love, with His church. It is a good thing for you to be familiar with your future. This world is problematic. Traps and snares and distractions and cares and toil and hardship and pain and adversity; this world is problematic. We endeavor to make our world better and that's good but only Christ has the answer. Death and resurrection is the only genuine answer.

The Master has us all in His hands. Such care, such provision, such consideration of every variable – Jesus has us all in His hands. Faith realizes this truth and celebrates it even in the face of difficulty. The book of Revelation was written for the church in crisis. Christians suffer. The world is fallen, dark forces align themselves against Christ and Christians are persecuted. But we have hope. That's why God gave the church the book of Revelation – to waken hope for those being persecuted. Hope is as vital and alive and treasured now as it has ever been. The vision of your future in the book of Revelation is an I.V. of hope with a direct line to your heart, your soul. Our friends, our beloved friends have gone ahead of us. They are in heaven. But one day each of our names will be read at an All Saints Day service. This morning, you are called to see your friends and see your future.

John's vision of heaven – he sees the elect, the heavenly host. 144,000; the number 12 represents perfection and completeness. Twelve times twelve is completeness multiplied by completeness. 1,000 (10^3) signifies greatness, so twelve times twelve times a thousand is a large and perfect number, not to be taken literally. That is God telling us that all the company of heaven is a perfect number, the extraordinary and perfect number of all those whom He has called to Himself. You are in that perfect number. For you, Christ has died and prepared a place within that holy number. You are safe in Christ's death and resurrection. Baptized, you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. It is a great host. Innumerable, vast, from every corner of this globe – brothers and sisters all, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. You, even now, are a part of that heavenly host. Our worship on earth has the same focus, the same Crucified King as the center of our faith. He is among us with His Words and His wounds, to shepherd us toward our heavenly destiny.

White robes – they are wearing white robes. Blood made them white. Holy; blood makes you holy. There is no holiness apart from Christ and His shed blood. He died, this Lamb. Shed His blood, this Lamb; to wash you of your sin. The filthy rags of your deceit, your lust, your pride and your selfishness – you were washed. The same blood that flowed from the wounds of

Almighty God as He hung in agony on the Holy Cross, that blood washed you and made you a saint. Cleansed to the bone, you were washed in blood and vested in His righteousness (you have a white robe). That is your heavenly garment which you wear now – Christ’s righteousness; you are a saint. He shares His holiness with you and because of that and that alone, you are a saint. To be sure, you still sin. You are, in this life, two things at once – saint and sinner – 100% of each, all the time, perpetually. In heaven, the sinful nature is left behind. What a delight that will be! What a delight for our friends who have gone before us! Pure! Spotless! They are fit to mingle with angels and stand before God unashamed.

Bob Pickering; Ken Haarala; Barbara Larrabee; Sue Meaney; Ruth Wood; Sharen Ross; Ben Whittier; first of all, what personality! What liveliness and character and humor and wit and love and personality! They stand before the throne and they hold palm branches, welcoming the King who passes on His way; welcoming the King who inaugurated His kingdom by shedding His blood. That is just our little tribe in this last year. There is a continuous pouring in of the elect from this world of care to the realm of peace. The Lord Christ shelters 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” (Rev 7:16-17).

There are divisions in this world. Sin brings about separation and confusion and conflict. That is our earthly lot. We strive for harmony but it is elusive. Heaven is harmony. People from diverse backgrounds all harmonious, all united, all within the perfect family of Our Father. Barriers caused by diversity of language, caused by fractured morality, caused by attempts to make some superior and some inferior – that is all gone, that is all done away with in Christ. Those barriers disappear in heaven. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all! Unity! Truth and unity and freedom all blended into one harmonious Spirit, one harmonious Life, all while maintaining the beauty that is the full palette of human individuality. Our loved ones in heaven – they enjoy the harmony that exists within God; they are united, one with another.

In heaven, they have come out of the great tribulation. Wars, famine, plague, divorce, disease, loneliness, addiction, poverty, abuse, abortion, crime, terrorism, corruption, hurricane, tornado, tsunami, martyrdom, human trafficking, slavery, and perversion – this broken world is a great tribulation. It takes great courage, great faith to navigate this life well, to not be broken spiritually by what we must endure. How anyone can treat this life as the end-all be-all is beyond me. Our friends in heaven... they are free from all that now. No worries about what tomorrow will bring. No sense of disappointment, no critical voice in their head complaining about their failures. Tribulation, external and internal, we feel it with excessive regularity. Those in heaven are done with all that – that’s where we are headed! We feebly struggle; they in glory shine (For All the Saints, LSB #677, st. 4).

Saints in heaven – that is the portrait of the reading from Revelation. I want to be there, with you, with them, with prophets and apostles and martyrs and with the woman who wept at Christ’s feet, with the woman who begged for crumbs from His table, with the Centurion who watched our Lord die, with the blind man who was healed at the pool of Siloam, with Rahab and

Eve and St. Augustine, with Benjamin Whittier and Gordon Jones and Bill Bracy. I want to be there, in heaven, with you, with saints from Asia and Africa and South America, and with my mother. We are on our way. The way is glorious. Though it is only by much tribulation that we enter the kingdom of heaven, the way is glorious for the way is Christ. He leads us. As He leads us, He feeds us. Heavenly food – the bread of His glorified body, the intoxicating wine of paradise that is His blood; He feeds us.

At this altar, we have the feast of heaven. At this altar, heaven and earth overlap. At this altar, we are with the saints who have gone before us. At this altar is the feast of forgiveness and divine love. Hope is regenerated by way of this feast. Hope is alive in Christ's church for heaven's Prince brings a feast of victory and we become one with Him. Hope is alive in Christ's church because salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, and that salvation is given to us in this eucharistic meal. Hope is alive in Christ's church because this vision of heaven takes grip in our mind and we are pulled forward by the force of His Spirit. Hope is alive in Christ's church because the crucified King is risen and death has no sting. Hope is alive among us and we echo our friends in heaven and we say: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen!" (Revelation 7:12).