

November 7, 2021  
All Saints Day (Observed)  
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH  
Pastor Joel Sutton

Revelation 7:9-17 (1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12)

WASHED AND MADE WHITE IN THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB.

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

Our text for meditation today comes from the Revelation of St. John, the 7th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

The Festival of All Saints Day arose from the Christian tradition of celebrating the martyrdom of saints on the anniversary of their martyrdom. As the centuries passed, there were so many martyrs, both known and unknown, that in the 8th century the Church decided to celebrate their memory on a common date. November 1st was selected. We observe it today.

Make no mistake. The purpose of All Saints Day is *not* to worship the *saints*. As Lutheran Christians we neither *worship* nor *pray* to the saints who have gone before. Scripture is clear that:

***“... there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who gave himself as a ransom for all...”*** (1 Timothy 2:5–6)

When you hear the word *saint*, perhaps you think of a school mascot or the New Orleans Saints football team. Possibly you’ve used the word to describe someone who lives an exceptionally pious life, or to distinguish one’s reputation from what you perceive as the truth, saying: “*You know Charlie... Charlie is no saint.*”

The word *saint* literally means: “***dedicated to God, holy, sacred.***” (cf: BDAG, 10) In short, to be a *saint* is to be set apart and belong to God, dedicated for His service. This means that every Christian, alive or dead, is considered a *saint*. It’s not because of the virtuous and holy life that they *live* or *have lived* – but it’s on account of the virtuous and holy life, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus which is imputed to sinners by means of baptismal waters.

You, baptized believer, even though you are a sinner, you are still one of God’s *saints*. It’s not because of anything you have done – but it’s on account of Christ’s work of salvation on your behalf. It is not your work but a work of Christ. St Paul writes:

***Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”*** (Ephesians 5:25–27)

St John uses similar “*washing*” imagery in his book of Revelation. He writes:

*“<sup>13</sup> Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” <sup>14</sup> 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.” (Revelation 7:13–14)*

What God revealed to John in a vision, He records in complex symbolic imagery without an explicit explanation. In his Concordia Commentary on the book of Revelation, Louis Brighton says:

*“The literary style of the author of Revelation is more that of an artist than of a technical writer (cf. 12:1–2). He thinks and writes in visual patterns rather than in logical axioms.” (cf: Brighton, Revelation, Concordia Commentary, 23)*

So, when we read the Holy Spirit inspired imagery written in Revelation, we take it *metaphorically*, not *literally*. (cf: Brighton, Revelation, Concordia Commentary, 24–25) Unfortunately, some interpreters today attempt to read Revelation literally, as a series of end-times events that happen one after the other. Because of this, many mistakenly believe that Christ will return to take all Christians out of the world and leave the unbelievers behind to suffer tribulation until He returns again to begin a 1,000-year reign. And then, on the Last Day He will return again for the final judgment. (cf: Engelbrecht, The Lutheran Study Bible, 2197–2198)

But as Lutheran Christians, believe that Scripture teaches that the reign and rule of Christ on earth began at Jesus’ Baptism in the Jordan River. (cf: Gibbs, Matthew 1:1–11:1, Concordia Commentary, 47–49) It also teaches that Christ will return again, *only once*, at His second coming. (cf: (Mt 25:31–46; Jn 5:28–29; Acts 24:15; 1Thes 4:13–15; Rev 1:7; 20:11–15) As we confess in the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds, Christ is seated at the right hand of God the Father and on the Last Day He will raise both believers and unbelievers from the dead for the final judgment.

As for the *Great Tribulation*, all you have to do is look at your life and your circumstances – and you know that you are living in *tribulation*. Every Christian experiences *tribulation*: suffering, pain, the death of loved ones, and the testing of your faith. Each of these *tribulations* points to the future *great tribulation* at the very End. But for the you, each particular moment of your suffering is your *great tribulation*. (cf: Revelation, Concordia Commentary, Brighton, 199) And as one of God’s *saints*, because of the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, God rescues His *saints* out of the *Great Tribulation*.

Our bulletin cover and our first reading this morning point us to the *saints* living in the *Church Triumphant*... those who’ve died and rest from their labors in heaven, including your believing loved ones who have gone on before. They are a host arrayed in white robes, washed in the blood of the Lamb standing before the throne of God. Our other two readings point us in a different direction... to the *Church Militant*... pointing to *saints* such as you and me, baptized and redeemed children of God, who eagerly await the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Throughout the book of Revelation, John describes both of these realities: the ***Church Militant*** and the ***Church Triumphant***, that is, the terrifying sufferings of Christians on earth, and the reign of Christ Jesus as Lord exalted in heavenly glory. As John describes these two realities, God's people on earth are encouraged to cling to the Father's promises in Christ Jesus. In faith, grasp hold to the eternal glory that awaits you for the sake of Christ. And it strengthens and encourages you and me and all believers to share the redeeming Good News of Christ crucified to save sinners in our daily stations of life so that the Holy Spirit might bring them to faith in Christ.

John didn't illustrate the earthly trials and tribulations to cause you to despair but to prepare you of the realities that all Christians will face. They serve as a warning, so that you guard against the temptations of the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh – and so that you trust in Christ Jesus who has defeated sin, death, and the devil. John includes them so that you cling to your baptismal promises, that you are safe and secure within the Holy Ark of Christ's Church, with Christ Himself as the cornerstone. (cf: Ephesians 2:19–20) The gates of hell will not prevail against it. (cf: Matthew 16:18)

To be sure, sharing the Good News of salvation in Christ many times, brings persecution and tribulation. Maybe not persecuted to the point of martyrdom, but you ***will*** be reviled, and people ***will*** utter all kinds of evil against you. But as Jesus says in our Gospel lesson:

***"<sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*** (Matthew 5:12)

Just as our Lord has taken those saints we name this morning in the Prayers of the Church out of the Great Tribulation, so too, will He come for you. In our text, John describes the saints, with sins forgiven by the blood of Christ, clothed in the righteousness of the Lamb. The Lamb presents them to the heavenly Father. The multitude stands pure and holy in the presence of God and the Lamb:

***"<sup>10</sup> and cry... out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"*** (Revelation 7:10)

Indeed:

***"These are the ones [that God has rescued]... out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."***  
(Revelation 7:14)

The language in our text sounds like it is the saints who do the washing of their robes. But as we heard from St Paul earlier, it is Christ who does the cleansing by the washing of water with the Word. He alone presents His saints to Himself holy and without blemish. Salvation is by grace alone. It is impossible for you to wash yourself or your robe and achieve righteousness. Christian holiness is not a moral quality or something you can earn. Christian holiness is received for the sake of Christ. God alone can turn scarlet sins as white as snow. (cf: Isaiah 1:18).

Scripture teaches that the reign and rule of Christ on earth began at Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan River, and He built His Church on earth. (cf: Matthew 16:18 ) He was crucified and died for sinners, is risen from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God, but

He still reigns among His people today through the holy ark of His Church on earth. (cf: Revelation 1:5–6) St Peter writes:

***“... you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”*** (1 Peter 2:9)

St. Paul writes:

***“<sup>13</sup> He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”*** (Colossians 1:13–14)

In St John’s first epistle letter he writes:

***“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”*** (1 John 3:1)

Dear children of God, you are His saints. He has called you to be His own and set you apart in Baptism. As you continue to abide with the Lamb in repentance and faith, your robe is continually washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb by means of Word and Sacrament. Clinging to your baptismal promises, you are safe and secure withing the Ark of Christ’s Church, with Christ Himself as the cornerstone. (cf: Ephesians 2:19–20) The gates of hell will not prevail against it. (cf: Matthew 16:18)

As we prayed in the Collect of the Day:

***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, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen***

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, Amen.