

November 6, 2022
All Saints Day (Observed)
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

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

FOR THE SAKE OF CHRIST, YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD, A SAINT SET APART FOR SERVICE.

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 St John’s First Epistle Letter, the 3rd chapter, which you heard read earlier.

The Festival of All Saints Day arose from the Christian tradition of celebrating the martyrdom of the saints on the anniversary of their martyrdom. As the centuries passed, there were so many martyrs, both known and unknown, that the Church decided to celebrate their memory on a common date. November 1st was selected. We observe it today as we name our dead before the Lord, those members here at St Timothy who have died since last All Saints Day. We also remember those who died in infancy: the miscarried, the aborted, and the stillborn, also those who have been martyred for the sake of Christ.

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, who gave himself as a ransom for all...” (1 Timothy 2:5–6)

The word saint literally means: ***“dedicated to God, holy, sacred.”*** (cf: BDAG, 10) 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 is not because of the virtuous and holy life that they live or have lived – but it is on account of the virtuous and holy life, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus which is imputed to sinners by means of baptismal waters where sin-stained garments are washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. (cf: Revelation 7:14) At the font God takes sinners and makes them saints, simultaneously sinner and saint. He takes those who were once dead in sin and makes them alive in Christ. This includes those children who died prior to Baptism, whom while alive and in the womb, were brought and commended to Christ in their parent’s prayers.

We remember the saints who have died and rest from their labors (cf: Revelation 14:13) because of their faithful witness to the true faith – that is – faith in Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior this world will ever know. Death seems to be one of the hardest subjects to talk about. Possibly because it is usually connected with sickness, pain, and sometimes tragedy. We prefer to ignore

it like it does not exist. But death is common. People die every day. And unless you are still alive on Judgement Day, you too will experience an earthly death. Scripture teaches us that:

“... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23)

“... the wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23)

Losing a loved one is painful because they are someone whom you loved. You alone know the connection you had with them. You alone know how deep your love was for them. Their death leaves a huge hole in your heart. But there is a love that is greater than human love. It is a love that gives *hope* to all who grieve. It is a love that is incomprehensible and beyond all human imagination. *That* love is the love of God your heavenly Father, the love He has for you and for all the saints who from their labors rest. What kind of love is this? St John writes:

“¹¹ 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)

John is writing to baptized believers in Christ, those who are simultaneously sinners and saints, such as you and me. God loves you, not because of your lovableness, but because, in spite of your unloveableness, He desired that you be His child. He gave you the right to become His child because of Christ. (John 1:12) And so you are. Though you are a sinner, God proclaims you a saint. A child of God.

As a sinner you daily battle against the unholy trinity, wrestling with temptations from the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh. Nothing good dwells in you. The good that you know you should do – you leave undone and do the very things that you know you should *not* do. Even when you desire to do good, you do the sinful things that dwell within you. (cf: Romans 7:15–25) But from before the foundation of the world, God saw you dead in your sin and transgression and loved you. He provided a way that you could become His own child. He showed His love for you in that while you were still a sinner in all your unloveableness Christ died for you so that you might be called a child of God. (cf: Romans 5:6–8) And so you are. You *are* a saint. You *are* a child of God.

By the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, God made you His child and a saint in Baptism, uniting you with Christ in His death and resurrection, pouring His love into your heart through that very same Holy Spirit. (cf: Romans 5:5; Titus 3:4–6) You were given all of Christ’s gifts won on the cross on your behalf and your sin-stained garment was washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. Though you are a sinner, for the sake of Jesus, God sees you as a saint. And because you are a saint and child of God – the world does not want any part of you because it wanted no part of Jesus. It does not know you because it did not know Him. (cf: 1 John 3:1) People who are opposed to God are opposed to those who believe in His Son. But Jesus says:

“¹¹ “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:11–12)

Too be sure, even though you are a saint and child of God, you will stumble along the way. You and I daily sin much and are nothing more than beggars before our heavenly Father. The devil

will accuse you, saying, “*You can’t be a child of God because you sin!*” He will stop at nothing in attempt to steal your faith, causing you to suffer every sort of trial and 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 of the world. But 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 their tribulation. John writes in our text:

“² Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” (1 John 3:2)

You are God’s child right now. That is the *hope* of every Christian. The dictionary definition of the word “*hope*” is: “*a feeling of expectation and desire.*” (Concise Oxford English Dictionary) Worldly *hope* is a feeling, a fluttering sensation inside somewhere like wishful thinking. But Christian *hope* is entirely different. Christian *hope* based on something outside of us. It is a confident trust in what is not seen (cf: Hebrews 11:1) grounded on the promises in God’s Word. Christian *hope* is yours because God has not only *called* you His child, He has *made* you His child through the innocent suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus on your behalf.

And Christian *hope* does not stop there. Christian *hope* is knowing that you will be like Him. This does not mean you will become God, or like some sort of god like some false religions teach. In His lectures on the First Epistle of John, Martin Luther says:

“For God is infinite, but we are finite creatures. Moreover, the creature will never be the Creator. Yet we shall be like Him. God is life. Therefore we, too, shall live. God is righteous. Therefore we, too, shall be filled with righteousness. God is immortal and blessed. Therefore we, too, shall enjoy everlasting bliss, not as it is in God but the bliss that is suitable for us.” (LW 30, 268)

In eternity you and I will see God as He is. But on this side of heaven, words cannot accurately describe it. It can only be described figuratively, as John does in his Revelation as we heard in our first reading. (cf: Revelation 7:9–17) Like the saints who have gone before, you know you live and love only by God’s grace. He loved you first. (cf: 1 John 4:19) He sent His Son to win victory over sin, death, and the devil. He set you apart and adopted you in Baptism purifying you, washing your robe and making it white in the blood of the Lamb. Every day as you wake, make the sign of the cross, confessing your sins and doubts and failures, and remember your Baptismal promises, taking comfort in the promise that:

“... everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.” (1 John 3:3)

You are purified because you have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. That means you are free from sin. Not just the effects of sin, but from the power of sin. By the power of the Holy Spirit, you are free to serve and love your neighbor as God in Christ serves and loves you. Serving and loving because you are afraid of punishment if you do not serve and love is not true love, is it? Just as serving and loving because you expect something in return is not truly to love. In his Galatians commentary, Luther writes:

“[Good works] *should be done as fruits of righteousness... Having been made righteous* [and pure], *we must do them... The tree produces fruit; the fruit does not produce the tree.*” (LW 26, 169)

Brothers and sisters in Christ:

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

You are a saint, God’s child whom He has set apart and dedicated for His service. It is not because of the virtuous and holy life that you live – but it is on account of the virtuous and holy life, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus which was imputed to you and poor sinners in Baptism. You were once dead in sin and but have been made alive in Christ. He carried all your grief, sorrow, shame, and sin, and put it to death on the cross. As a child of the heavenly Father, you are a blessed saint and heir of all that is His:

- Yours is kingdom of heaven.
- You shall be comforted.
- You shall inherit the earth.
- You shall be satisfied.
- You shall receive mercy.
- You shall see God face to face.
- You shall be called sons and daughters of God.
- Blessed are you dear saint and child of God, for your reward is great in heaven. (cf: Matthew 5:1-12; Gibbs, Matthew 1:1–11:1, 255–256)

Amen.

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