

November 5, 2023
All Saints Day (observed)
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Revelation 7:9–17

NO MORE HUNGER, NO MORE THIRST, NO MORE TEARS.

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

This past Wednesday, November 1st, the Christian Church solemnly celebrated The Feast of All Saints Day. We observe it today, naming before the Lord all those here at St Timothy who died in Christ since last All Saints Day and have joined the saints in heaven. 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 God, and 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 passed on to glory because of their steadfast witness to the true faith in Christ Jesus, the one and only Savior this world will ever know. They are the ones who taught us the Christian faith. They are the ones who prayed with us and prayed for us and placed God’s Word in our hands... and even dragged us to church kicking and screaming when we would’ve preferred to sleep late.

God used those saints to make a difference in our lives so we might press on in the true faith while living in this broken and sinful world, a world that is often described as a “*vale of tears*” or a “*valley of sorrow.*” Perhaps you recognize the phrase “*vale of tears*” or “*valley of sorrow*” from Luther’s explanation of the Seventh Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “*But deliver us from evil.*” Luther says:

“We pray in this petition, as the sum of all, that our Father in heaven would deliver us from every evil of body and soul, property and honor, and finally, when our last hour come, grant us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this vale of tears to Himself into heaven.” (A Short Explanation of Dr. Martin

Luther's Small Catechism: A Handbook of Christian Doctrine. Concordia Publishing house, 1943)

The expression "*vale of tears*" comes from Psalm 84:6 which in modern times is translated as the "*Valley of Baca*." The psalmist writes:

"Blessed are those whose strength is in you, [O Lord]... As they go through the Valley of Baca they make it a place of springs..." (Psalm 84:5–6)

The Hebrew word "*Baca*" is related to "*weeping*." (Enhanced Strong's Lexicon, Hebrew, #1056, #1058) So whether it's translated as the *valley of Baca*, the *valley of weeping*, the *valley of sorrows*, or the *vale of tears*, the psalmist describes life in this darkened and unsavory world for all who trust in Christ Jesus as *blessed* and *strengthened* by God, as you push forward and slog through the *weeping* and *tears*, making it a place of springs from which flow fruits of repentance and faith, serving and loving your neighbor just as God in Christ serves and loves you.

The *vale of tears* describes the Christian life as members of the *Church Militant*, that is, believers in Christ being sustained in Word and Sacrament, living in this broken and sinful world. It's a constant battle against the devil and his host, the world, and your own sinful flesh; however, when your last hour comes, our Lord will grant you a blessed end, and graciously take you from this *vale of tears* to Himself into heaven, transferring your membership into the *Church Triumphant*.

Whether you shed *physical tears* from your eyes or experience *emotional tears* in your heart, you don't have to look very far to witness the fact that we truly live in a *vale of tears*. One of the first things you recognize it that being a Christian **does not** exempt you from persecution, trials, tribulations, and suffering in this *vale of tears*. It is quite the opposite. Immediately upon being called to faith by the Holy Spirit, the devil sets up camp on your doorstep. And until you breathe your last breath on earth, he will never sleep, but be your constant companion causing you chaos and trouble. He doesn't waste his time harassing and leading astray the unbelievers of the world. They already belong to him. So he spends all his time bullying and badgering believers like you, bringing *tears* into your life, in an attempt to steal your faith.

It is true that the same physical distresses, adversities, and calamity afflict both believers and unbelievers alike. Illness, disease, and grief over death befalls all mankind regardless of faith. But Christians are tempted to believe that hardship in their lives or the death of a loved one is evidence of God's wrath, or an indication of His indifference or inability to protect those who believe. So hear this. That temptation in your time of weeping and sorrow is nothing other than the devil planting his seed of doubt in your heart and mind. It's always his first move... to create doubt in God's Word and promises. He knows that if he can simply plant enough seeds of doubt and hang out in your head long enough, he can draw you away from God and destroy your faith. Even in your happiest moments, your sinful nature focuses on the problems, the imperfections, the things that might have been, all which drive you to *tears*.

What *should* drive you and me to *tears* is the guilt of our own sinfulness. To fear physical distress, adversities, disease, and even death greater than you fear, love, and trust in God to sustain and deliver you is a sin that not only endangers your faith, but can, unless repented of, can lead to idolatry... the idolatry of trusting your doctor or the government or your retirement plan or your own wisdom and strength above God.

It's a mystery why, but even though God adopted you and set you apart as His saint in Baptism, in His hidden wisdom He allows you to daily battle against the unholy trinity of the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh, which desire to deprive you of the joy of the promises God made you in Baptism. In this *vale of tears*, 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. (cf: 1 John 3:1) He forgives you of all your sins, your sins of fear of distress, adversities, and calamity... your sin of idolatry of trusting in man instead of the true God.

While you are a sinner, at the same time you are a saint, set apart and belonging to God, dedicated for His service. And because you are His child, God is not blind or deaf to your *tears* and *weeping*. For the sinner/saint, by the grace of God for the sake of Jesus' innocent suffering and death, God hears and answers the prayers of those declared righteous in Christ. He took on the flesh of man and entered our *valley of sorrows* and shed His first *tears* in a manger in Bethlehem. (cf: Luke 2:7) Soon after His birth, Herod would come seeking His life, which in turn caused many mothers of slaughtered boys to *weep* and *wail*. (cf: Matthew 2:16–18)

Living in this *vale of tears*, Jesus experienced all the *sorrows* of this world and His heart goes out to all who mourn. He *wept* with Mary and Martha at the tomb of His good friend Lazarus. (cf: John 11:33–35) He *wept* over Jerusalem because of its blindness to Him. He wept because of God's divine judgment which would be soon poured out on the city. (cf: Luke 19:41) The writer to the Hebrews says that:

“... Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death...” (Hebrews 5:7)

... even as He was smitten by God and pierced for our transgressions on Calvary's cross. (cf: Isaiah 53:4–5)

But Christ came to do more than simply *weep* with the *sorrowful*. He came to take away their *tears*. To the widow at Nain, Jesus:

“.. had compassion on her and said to her, ‘Do not weep’” (Luke 7:13)

... and raised her son from the dead. To all those *weeping* and *mourning* at the death of Jairus' daughter, He said:

“Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping.” (Luke 8:52)

At first they laughed at Him but when He took her hand and said ***“Child arise,”*** their *tears* were gone. (cf: Luke 8:53) To Mary Magdalene who was *weeping* outside of Jesus' tomb, Jesus speaks her name and brings her the joy of His resurrection. (cf: John 20:11–16)

The fact of the matter is – life in this *vale of tears* is fleeting, short, and temporary. The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to you when you join the saints in heaven, which will reach its final and full glory at the Resurrection on the Last Day. A day is coming when John's Revelation which we heard in our

first reading will be your own vision. A huge multitude from every nation, clothed in white robes washed in the blood of the Lamb, with palm branches:

“... and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (Revelation 7:9–10)

The glory of your salvation, promised you in Baptism, which you have seen dimly throughout your entire life will be fully known. In the words of St John in our epistle reading:

“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)

So for now, we wait... and we *weep*... and we *mourn*. Jesus says:

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (Matthew 5:4)

Even as it is the nature of the Christian to *weep* and *lament*, it is the gift of God’s grace to turn your *weeping* and *sorrow* into joy. (cf: John 16:20) He has promised a day in heaven when you:

“... shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore... For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be [your] shepherd, and he will guide [you] to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from [your] eyes.” (Revelation 7:16–17)

And as you wait for the day when God will dry your *tears*, you are freed to look for opportunities to dry the *tears* of others, to extend to them God’s own compassion, to bring them the good news of Jesus – who saw their *tears*, carried their *sorrows*, cleansed them by His blood, who will one day wipe every *tear* from their eyes. Why should you do that? Because you are a saint. You are set apart and belong to God, dedicated for His service. As you push forward and slog through the *weeping* and *sorrow* in this *vale of tears*, make it a place of springs from which flow fruits of repentance and faith, serving and loving your neighbor just as God in Christ serves and loves you. And finally, when your last hour comes, our Lord will grant you a blessed end, and graciously take you from this *vale of tears* to Himself into heaven.

Amen.

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