

The Festival of All Saints  
4 November, Anno Domini 2018  
Revelation 7:9-17  
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

This portion of the vision which was granted to St. John on the island of Patmos is filled with rich and immeasurable comfort. It is meant to bring peace to those who yet mourn in this life as they consider the eternal well-being of their loved ones who have fallen asleep in Jesus. There they sing the eternal praise of the Lord Jesus Christ who rescued them from death and damnation. It is also meant as comfort for the faithful who remain here, still mourning, still suffering, still weeping, as they look forward to the yet more glorious day when their weeping will have its end and the tears of sadness and despair will never again cloud their eyes.

“These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation.” Your suffering, dear Christian, has its end. It will not endure forever. And John shows you that the sufferings you endure in this life won’t even begin to compare with the surpassing joys that await you in the unveiled and eternal presence of Christ. One day you will be free of all the devil’s scheming and harassing. One day the world will no longer be able to trouble you with its lies. One day you won’t have stand in disbelief at the cruelty and wickedness that surrounds you. One day and forever you will know the freedom of never being tempted to sin, never again having to wrestle against the dark, shameful, evil desires of your own flesh and mind because they will be gone. One day, you will come out of this great tribulation and rest.

But that is not now. Here the tribulation rages on. Certainly, the Christian yearns for eternal peace. Often times those who are nearing the end of their earthly life express the desire to depart, much to the horror of their family. But why should we be surprised? Life is filled with pain and sadness. There are joys, to be sure. But this world is so terribly broken by sin that it’s no wonder people want to depart and go be with their Lord in paradise. Every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer we acknowledge that we are exiles in a strange land longing to be home. We call upon our heavenly Father “who art in heaven.” He’s in heaven. We’re not. We are here in the midst of a fierce and desperate battle. We are tired. We are wondering what calamity is next. At times it feels hopeless and pointless. Parents are worried that something terrible is going to happen to their children or that with the flood of temptations that surround them, it will be impossible to keep them in the faith. The wicked seem to flourish and God’s children seem to languish. The Christian family is one of the most despised institutions on the planet. The young and the old are disposed of like last night’s

pizza box. Death and pain and suffering and chaos are celebrated. The Christian Church, by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed, is plagued with false teachers and looks weak and hopelessly broken. There is a relentless attack on the truth with the enemies of God's Word doing everything in their power to turn God's created order completely upside-down. Come, Lord Jesus! Come quickly! We want to be free. We want to be free of the oppression of those who hate You and Your Holy Word.

Who then are those who will be free, who will stand before the throne and before the Lamb? Is it those who have tried hard? Is it those who meant well? Is it those who had a great work ethic? Is it those who accomplished the most and made the best use of the time given them on earth? No. Those things have their place and usefulness on earth but they are irrelevant in the kingdom of God. In fact, the ones singing the praises of salvation are those whose filthy robes have been washed clean in Blood. Those who inherit the kingdom of heaven are exactly the people who know they shouldn't, who know they deserve the kingdom of hell precisely because of their unloving deeds, their unholy thoughts, and their ungodly actions. Any who would bring their good works before God will be condemned. Any who place their hope for salvation in anything other than the Blood of the Lamb will not be singing for all eternity, but weeping and gnashing their teeth in the fires of hell.

You can't make your own robes white. The filth is immeasurable. The stains are too set it. And when we honestly examine our lives according to the Ten Commandments, there is only one conclusion that any of us can draw - I am a wretched man! If I were to stand before the judgment seat of God just as I am, there is no question as to His judgment - absolutely and unequivocally guilty. I can't change what I've done. I can't take back the angry words, the perverted thoughts, or my thankless heart. I am empty of any true goodness because I have dared to trust in myself rather than in Christ Jesus. I have worshipped at the altar of more false gods than I can count, most of whom are really just me. I have despised the precious treasure of my Baptism and my inheritance as a child of God. I have despised and angered my parents and other authorities. I haven't made my requests and prayers known to God. I have been quick to judge and assumed the worst of others without bothering to talk with them. I have loved my job, my family, my sleep, and my fun more than the opportunity which God has granted me in His mercy to hear the Word of Truth and Life, gather with my Christian brothers and sisters, and participate in the Feast of Victory for our God whereby He saves me and strengthens me. I have sinned. I have fallen far short of the glory of God. The Law clearly demonstrates that I am no saint and surely deserve nothing but God's temporal and eternal punishment. My heart and my eyes are filled with tears and groaning because of the depths of my depravity and rebellion against God.

Yet, for these very reasons and so many others, the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone with the Father and the Holy Spirit is holy, descended from heaven. He didn't come to demand things of you but to win things for you, things that He gives freely to every sinner who hungers and thirsts after the righteousness which comes from God. He came to pour out His innocent Blood as an offering in your place. His pure and spotless Blood has borne all the punishment that rightly belongs to you. His Blood silences the raging accusations of the Law, accusations that Satan happily whispers in your ear day after day. His Blood, mingled with the baptismal waters, has scoured clean the deep filth of your sin - not because you showed yourself worthy (that simply wouldn't make any sense); not because your sins are less heinous than others (because they aren't). He has done this sheerly out of His love for you and other sinners.

Now, washed in the cleansing Blood of Christ, you are sons and daughters of the Most High God, not symbolically or figuratively, but in truth. Of His mercy, God incorporated you into the mystical Body of Christ Jesus. You are part of the divine family and your divine Father gives freely of His kingdom to His dear children. This isn't your future. It is your present. Even though now, our longing eyes don't yet share with the departed faithful the vision glorious of our Savior's face, we are no less His and He no less ours. He graciously descends to us that He might be with us now where we are and that we might be with Him where He is and promises to be. Your Savior's mercy, His protection, His provision - these are all yours right now. It is His voice you hear in the absolution, in the reading of Holy Scripture, in the holy liturgy, and in the preaching. And He seals His Word to you by giving You Himself, Body and Blood, under bread and wine.

That is now. The day is coming when our Lord will come to judge the living and the dead and His beloved Baptized will go to be with Him and there you will enjoy the uninterrupted peace and rest and comfort that you so dearly long for now. There is so much that we, as children of God, have to look forward to. But it is not in the things of this world. What the faithful departed enjoy now cannot be found in anything this world has to offer. You can search from the deepest depths to the highest mountains; you can strive and strain and try to achieve all you want, but you will never find what Christ alone gives to His children. You are blessed now whether you have more than you know what to do with or you are desperately trying to figure out a way to put food on the table for lunch today. You belong to God right now no less than the saints in paradise. The same Lord is Lord of you both and lavishes the same love and care and mercy on both. The same Jesus stands in your midst in the Holy Communion, offering the same eternal peace, that sits on the heavenly throne shading those who have already come out of the great tribulation and now wear the crown of eternal life that had been laid up for them. You wear the same baptismal robe and your prayers

and praises ascend to the same Lord. The same Lord shepherds you that shepherds them.

But do not let yourself be fooled or blinded or drawn away from the things of Christ. "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb," not to man. There will be many who are baptized and sit in church pews who will not be counted among those wearing the white robes. Why? Because to wash your robe in the Lamb's Blood is to set the whole confidence of your heart on nothing but the Lamb's Blood. Such baptizing with water indicates this - that the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires. Upon the Old Adam's death, a new man ought to daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. Neither the greatest of your good nor the depth of your evil are to receive the trust of your heart. The Lord Jesus Christ alone has shed His Blood and by that Blood declared you righteous. But if you are satisfied with fleeting and empty earthly comfort and earthly treasure then you have despised the gifts of your father and the treasures of heaven will be kept from you.

Beloved of God, be patient. Remain with your Lord where He has promised to remain with you in and through the Means of Grace. Your time of tribulation has its end and at its end is promised the rest and joy of our Lord's eternal and immediate presence to all who persevere in the faith. There, fear and sorrow and death will never again be able to distress you and on that day you will be like your Lord, free of every spot and stain, and you will see Him perfectly as He is.

In the Name of +Jesus.