

All Saints' 11/7/21  
Revelation 7:9-17

AFTER THIS I LOOKED, AND BEHOLD, A GREAT MULTITUDE THAT NO ONE COULD NUMBER, FROM EVERY NATION, FROM ALL TRIBES AND PEOPLES AND LANGUAGES, STANDING BEFORE THE THRONE AND BEFORE THE LAMB, CLOTHED IN WHITE ROBES, WITH PALM BRANCHES IN THEIR HANDS, AND CRYING OUT WITH A LOUD VOICE, "SALVATION BELONGS TO OUR GOD WHO SITS ON THE THRONE, AND TO THE LAMB!"

It may surprise you that tombstones, headstones as we know them today, were not originally meant to mark the graves of the dead. Rather, they originally served a far different purpose. People who lived in the Middle Ages were extremely superstitious and, in their superstition, they believed souls of the dead would come back to the living as ghouls and ghosts in order to haunt you. So, these superstitious folks came up with a solution to their dilemma – they started putting large rocks, boulders, on the graves of the dead in order to prevent the souls of the departed from escaping the grave.

And, you could guess the rest of the story – somewhere along the line, some enterprising free market capitalist learned that if you engraved the name of the deceased on the rock covering a grave, the loved ones of the deceased would gladly pay him cash money and – walla – the modern headstone industry was born.

Dear Saints of God, we know where the souls of the faithful departed are because the Bible tells us,

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev 7:9-10).

On All Saints, we remember that the souls of the faithful departed are in the glory of heaven and see God face-to-face. Their joy is very great, since they are removed from all the troubles of this life. There is no hint of sadness in them, only the joyous expectation of an even greater glory to come when their bodies will be raised on the day of the great Resurrection.

And, we remember that our home is in heaven. One day, we will leave behind this great tribulation of today to take our place among that “great multitude that no one could number ... standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in [our] hands.

But, but, you are not yet there. Today, you feebly struggle. The saints in heaven have been set free from every burden and sorrow. But, you are, as your Lord Christ describes, you: “poor in spirit,” “meek,” “hungering and thirsting for righteousness, persecuted, and insulted. You are not in glory. You live in the darkness of the valley of this shadow of death.

You are the ones who mourn. You weep and sorrow in this life. You walk in danger with every step of earthly life because Satan, the great Accuser and father of all lies, has marked you as his prey and is plotting to deceive you with his hidden snares. You have been injured by his razor-sharp teeth and cutting claws. He stalks and pursues you, as a lion seeking to devour its prey, hoping that the pain he inflicts will drive you from your Lord Jesus.

And, the devil is not alone as your adversary! The sinful world also lies in wait for you, watching for a chance to strike you. Persecution, injustice, slander will find you. The world cannot tolerate you anymore than

it tolerated Jesus. Since the world has hated your dear Lord, then it most certainly also hates you.

You have undoubtedly been hurt by the world before, and you may well be again. Perhaps, you have even been injured by someone you loved, someone you trusted. Perhaps, even by a fellow believer in Jesus -- those are the wounds that sting the most.

And then there is the battle against your own sinful flesh. You've heard me say it before and I say it again: your greatest struggles are not with Satan or the world, but the weakness of your sinful flesh. You must grapple and wrestle against yourself. You must deny yourself. You must fight the good fight, and you must fight it against yourself.

In the battle of this Church Militant, you walk by faith, not by sight and, in faith, we believe, "lo, there breaks a yet more glorious day" (*LSB* 677:7). A glorious day awaits you because Jesus, though He was rich, for your sake became poor, that He might obtain for you the Kingdom of Heaven. He is the One Who is truly gentle, meek, and mild, Who by "with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death," redeemed the entire earth (Meaning of 2<sup>nd</sup> Article). He is the One who hungered and thirsted for your righteousness. He is the Merciful One, Who is Mercy itself; He is the Peacemaker, Who brought a true and lasting Peace between God and man by His death on the cross. He is the only-begotten Son of God, Who was reviled and persecuted for us, so that you may be righteous in Him.

Jesus gives you the certainty of that more glorious day to come because He humbled Himself to be born of a virgin to unlock heaven's door by atoning for your sin by His holy cross, His innocent suffering, and death.

Baptizing and living in Christ, you bear His image in this word. Although He looked only like a poor carpenter's son, He was the all-glorious Son of the Almighty God. To the world and, sadly, all-to-often to you own eyes, you look weak, not important, but you are a child of the heavenly Father, waiting to be revealed in glory on the Last Day.

Until that day you depart this great tribulation, you wait, often sorrowful of heart, afflicted by sins and trials. You long to be freed from every temptation and weakness of your sinful flesh. You hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God. You yearn to see God with your own eyes, because today your eyes see the death, the injustice, the sorrow, the awful affliction of sin.

You live today in the tension of sinner and saint and you will live in that tension until you die. You will be "poor in spirit," you will mourn, you will be meek, you will hunger and thirst for righteousness, you will be persecuted, and insulted. And yet, Jesus says, "Blessed are you." We live in the hope of the life that the departed saints enjoy this very day:

They are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter 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 7:15-17).

But, you are not there yet. So, for today, take heart in the Word of Jesus. He assures you that He is with you. His rod and His staff comfort you. Through that Word and the eating and drinking of His Body and Blood, He makes you strong and brave so that you do not fix your eyes on what you see today. Because if you do fix your eyes on what you see today, you will despair and conclude that God does not love you. Look

past the sorrow and decay, and see instead the face of God and the Lamb Christ.

Be patient in your trials and know that God is working good. The momentary troubles of this life are not worth comparing with the glory that is to come. Continue to pray with all the Church of God: Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.