

ALL SAINTS DAY

November 2, 2014

Revelation 7:9-17:

“We Feebly Struggle, They in Glory Shine”

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today we are celebrating All Saints Day. Since the saints are so important in the Roman Catholic church, some might make the mistake of thinking that we Lutherans view the saints in the same way that they do - that we have gone Roman Catholic. That isn't the case at all. Just for starts, we believe that all those who are in heaven as well as those who believe in Jesus Christ on earth, are saints - holy people made holy by the holiness of Jesus Christ - not because the pope declares them holy.

Even though there isn't to my knowledge a definitive "head count," there are over 10,000 saints in the Roman Catholic church. Most people are familiar with the idea of "patron saints." Patron saints are chosen as special protectors or guardians over certain areas of life. For example, Francis of Assisi loved nature and so he is patron of ecologists. Francis de Sales was a writer and so he is patron of journalists and writers. Clare of Assisi was named patron of television because one Christmas, when she was too ill to leave her bed, she supposedly saw and heard Christmas Mass even though it was taking place miles away. Sounds almost like the Greek gods where each god rules over a certain area - Zeus, the god of the sky; Hera, the goddess of marriage, mothers, and families; Poseidon; god of the sea; Demeter, goddess of agriculture; and on and on it goes.

Roman Catholics also believe that since saints lived holier lives than we are living, they are especially close to God in heaven. Consequently, they feel that the prayers of the saints are particularly effective, more effective than our prayers. So, they will pray to the saints and ask them to talk to God on their behalf. C. H. Little writes: "When such appeal is made, it is done on the false assumption that the saints are more accessible, more tenderhearted, and more apt to hear and hearken to our prayers than the Lord Himself, who gave Himself for us and who is far more ready to hear than we are to ask."

From the Roman Catholic mind-set, the saints serve as mediators between us and God, interceding for us. The problem with all of this for Lutheran Christians is that it is unbiblical. In 1 Timothy 2:5-6 we learn that "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all." And it says in Hebrews 7:25, "[Jesus] is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." And, in regard to those who have died and gone into heaven, the Bible says "you [God] are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us . . . (Isaiah 63:16)."

So, what do we Lutherans think about the saints and why do we observe "All Saints Day?" The *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* makes it crystal clear:

Our Confession approves honors to the saints. For here a threefold honor is to be approved. The first is thanksgiving. For we ought to give thanks to God because He has shown examples of mercy; because He has shown that He wishes to save men; because He has given teachers or other gifts to the church . . . The second service is the strengthening of our faith: when we see the denial forgiven Peter, we also are encouraged to believe the more that grace truly super-abounds over sin, Rom. 5:20. The third honor is the imitation, first, of faith, then

of the other virtues, which everyone should imitate according to his calling. These true honors the adversaries do not require. They [Roman Catholics] dispute only concerning invocation.

In other words, we give thanks for the fact that God shows us his mercy in the lives lived by other Christians that we may understand his mercy in our own lives. As we examine the lives of those who believed in Jesus Christ we are strengthened. And, in so far as they lived Christian lives, they serve as examples for us. The *Augsburg Confession* (Article XXI) expressly states: "The memory of saints may be set before us, that we may follow their faith and good works according to our calling." And, in support of the *Augsburg Confession*, it says in Hebrews 13:7-8, "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:7-8)." As you can see, Lutherans remember and imitate the saints while the Roman Catholics invoke the saints and implore their help. It was Jesus who said in John 14:6, "No one comes to the Father but by me."

Now, with everything in mind, we come to the theme of our message from the hymn *For All The Saints: We Feebly Struggle, They in Glory Shine*. Indeed! Today, we are to see the end of our feeble struggle in what the Scriptures reveal to us about those who have gone on before us. We are to understand that the Lord gave them the strength to persevere. We give the Lord thanks that he is doing the same for us. We see how merciful God has been to them in every way through his one and only Son, and as we receive that same mercy we are mightily strengthened in the faith. We note all that they had to suffer before glory, and we humbly follow in their footsteps. As they died and rose with the Lord, we gladly do the same.

First of all, we feebly struggle. As they struggled with sin, we struggle with sin. As they dealt with diseases and sickness of the body and mind, with getting old and falling apart, so we experience the same. They struggled with their emotions and feelings, their anger and desires for vengeance, fears and anxieties, sadness and sorrows, change and decay. We feel the same. Like it was for them, we struggle on earth. We fight false teaching and hostility toward the good news of salvation. We look back into the past and we see their many weaknesses and how they feebly struggled.

But now, now, they in glory shine! For them, the struggle is now ended. God has given them rest from their labors. In Christ they lived and in Christ they died and are now at peace. For them, there is no more struggle with sin. Disease and sickness are gone, their youth is renewed. There is no more sadness and sorrow. Change and decay is gone. Their battle against false teachers and the hostility against the gospel is now at an end. They are with the Lord! It all comes together in Revelation 7, our epistle lesson:

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" 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.

"Therefore 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.”

In these words of the apostle John, we have been given a wonderful revelation of the church of all the saints at the end of time which includes us. If you listened carefully, you will have noticed that in this passage those who feebly struggle in the great tribulation join those who shine - here the Church Militant meets the Church Triumphant. It is what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, “Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them [with believers before us] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.”

Indeed! Those who have come out of the great tribulation - those who feebly struggle - are washed NOT in the blood of the saints who have died beforehand, but are washed by the blood of the Lamb. This is why they are white. This is why they in glory shine. This is why those who feebly struggle are caught up together with the saints of the past to meet the Lord in the air. They have *not* overcome because they trusted in other saints to intercede for them, but rather, they have overcome because they trust the one who died on the cross - Jesus Christ the Lamb - who forever intercedes on their behalf and guides them to the springs of living water. Saints - all of us who believe in Jesus - who from their labors rest!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott