

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

**Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen**

**All Saints Day (Observed) (2022)**

**Countless are the Saints Saved by the Lamb**

**Rev. Toby Byrd**

***“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!” (Revelation 7:9–10, ESV)***

The book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible is a book that is scary to some but to others, it is a book of great joy, for in this book St. John gives us a glimpse of the exalted reign of Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords as the Holy Spirit grants us peek into heaven, showing us the fulfillment of the Gospel, the promises of God to all who are followers of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

Thus, Revelation is the lens through which the Holy Spirit reveals and confirms the prophetic promise of Christ’ incarnation, death, and resurrection, revealing the restoration of God’s creation to its original glory and righteousness. Revelation grants us the final meaning and answer to everything that is revealed in Holy Scripture. It is the final confirmation of the divine truth and origin of God’s Word, both spoken and written. Furthermore, Revelation reminds every Christian of the urgency of holding fast to the one true faith, and our text for today, from the First Reading, grants us a glimpse of God’s promise to the *Countless Number of Saints who are Saved by the Lamb*.

The topic of our text this morning takes place between the sixth and seventh seals revealed in Revelation. The sixth seal speaks of the end of this world and the wrath of the Lamb upon the corruption of the earth, and the seventh seal speaks of the wrath of God which brings the earth to its end as the seven holy angels blow their trumpets while another angel takes the golden censer, usually meant to hold incense and the prayers of the saints as they are brought before God, but is now filled with fire from the altar of God and then thrown upon the earth, completing God’s judgment and bringing the Last Day to a close. Certainly, these two visions foster fear in the hearts of men. Fear from the reality that their unrepentant and unforgiven sins have consequences, consequences which they do not wish to think about or receive.

But it is the scene in between these visions that give Christians hope in the fulfillment of God’s promises for all who are in Christ Jesus. This is our text for today, that scene which has been described as the most beautiful picture in Holy Scripture, the saints of God in heaven: the Church triumphant.

What St. John sees brings him great comfort. Up to this point St. John has been filled with terror and his heart has been filled with sorrow as he witnessed the first six seals with their horrifying scenes. But now he is lifted up as he sees the Church Militant, the Church on earth, sealed with ***“the seal of the living God,” (Revelation 7:2, ESV)***. It is through this angelic action that God identifies and sets aside all who are believers in Christ Jesus, shielding them from the consequence of the Last Day; granting them an enduring faith to withstand the suffering and terror which is coming upon the earth. Moreover, St. John also sees the Church Triumphant, in

heaven, around the throne of God. These saints outnumber the Church on earth for their number cannot be counted. St. John writes, ***“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,” (Revelation 7:9, ESV)***

These scenes give St. John great comfort and hope for he now knows that no matter how much he and God’s people on earth suffer as they enter the valley of death, in this life they have been sealed by God, identified as His children, and God will protect them in their faith. Then, as he looks upon the Church Triumphant, St. John sees all those who have come out of the great tribulation, who have persevered in their great sufferings as children of God on earth and are now filled with joy and enthusiasm as they receive their heavenly reward. Having been sealed with the blessed waters of Baptism, God forgave all their sins and adopted them to be His children, to be members of His family not only in this life, but in the new life that He promises in the new heaven and the new earth.

Thus, today’s text shows us God’s Church triumphant. It shows us the glorious company of the saints in heaven, a company of which we as God’s saints on earth are waiting to join. Seeing this vision of St. John’s, each of us should be encouraged and emboldened to be about the mission God has given His Church, the mission to which He has called each of you, and that is adding to that great company of saints those who are not yet members by going forth in your daily vocations and boldly proclaiming the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus Christ to a world dying from sin, to a world who does not know of either the Church Militant or the Church Triumphant. And we know that today, as in the past, we live in a world that is rapidly succumbing to the desires of the flesh, the world, and Satan. As it was in the past, it is so today, the world is rapidly sinking into the cesspool of sin. Therefore, regardless of which way you turn, you find sin crouching at your door, tempting you and challenging your faith. None of us are immune from this scourge, not even the Church.

I recently read a news story about an Irish priest who preached a homily that reflected on sin, penitence, sainthood, and God’s forgiveness. In his sermon he condemned abortion, same sex marriage, homosexuality, and other sins of the flesh. But for his faithfulness to the truth of God’s Word, for his faithfulness of warning his parishioners, he was heckled by some in the congregation, who then walked out of the service. But to make matters worse, his bishop condemned the sermon and reprimanded the priest, saying his sermon did not reflect the Christian position. Wow! I do believe God should have a serious discussion with that bishop.

In his homily, the priest didn’t just condemn these obvious sins against God’s Fifth and Sixth Commandments, but he also preached the Gospel. Those sins of which he spoke, are sins which will preclude one from being counted among the saints standing around the throne of God. They are sins which condemn the perpetrator to hell if left unforgiven. But God is a forgiving God who desires nothing more than to forgive our sins. But to be forgiven one must recognize their sin and seek God’s forgiveness in contrition and repentance. Thus, the Church preaches the Law to show us our sins, warning us of the consequence of sin, and then the Church preaches the Gospel showing us God’s willingness to forgive our sins, to cleanse of from our sins that we may stand around His throne robed in the white robes of sinlessness and purity. But if the Church takes the position of the bishop, it is no longer performing its godly calling of being a watchman who warns God’s people of the danger of sin. God said through Ezekiel, ***“So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn***

*from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.” (Ezekiel 33:7–9, ESV)* Every true pastor knows his duty to be a watchman for God’s Church, crying out, beware of the world and her ways, she is of the devil.

Our Lord Jesus warned us of the dangers of the world when He said, ***“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” (John 15:18–19, ESV)*** The world is those upon whom the fire of the golden censer is thrown. The world is those who will not stand at Christ’s right hand on the Last Day, but at His left. The world are the goats, those whose names cannot be found in the book of life who will be thrown into the lake of fire, into hell for all eternity to suffer forever with Satan and his demons. But God would not have you be a goat. No, His desire is that you would be a sheep, a follower of the Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ. For these are people of faith, people who regret their sin, people who are contrite and repent of their sins seeking God’s forgiveness for the sake of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

Followers of Jesus Christ know that God has promised a New Covenant with the world. A covenant in which God says, ***“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (Jeremiah 31:31–34, ESV)***

This New Covenant was given to the Church on the night our Lord Jesus ate His last supper with His apostles. St. Luke tells us that after eating, Jesus took a cup of wine and gave it to His apostles saying, ***“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” (Luke 22:20, ESV)*** St. Matthew tells us at that same supper, Jesus ***“took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (Matthew 26:27–28, ESV)*** This New Covenant is the covenant of the blood of the Passover Lamb, the blood of God’s only begotten Son, Jesus Christ that forgives sins.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that it is, ***“Jesus, [who is] the mediator of a new covenant . . . the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel . . . Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.” (Hebrews 9:15; 12, 24, ESV)***

This promised eternal inheritance is that which St. John shows us in our text this morning, that Christ, our Lord and Savior, shed His blood so our sins could be forgiven. God, desiring that all people should be saved, gave us the gift of faith in the blessed waters of Baptism that we may believe in the atoning sacrifice of His only begotten Son and thereby He opened the door of His heavenly home to us, that we may be with Him and all the saints who have gone before us, standing around the throne of God, ***“crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Revelation 7:10, ESV)***

Thus, we pray: Help us Holy Father to continually sing the great angelic song, ***“saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.” (Revelation 7:12, ESV)*** As we also sing the great Te Deum, praising God, singing, “We praise You, O God; we acknowledge You to be the Lord. All the earth now worships You, the Father everlasting. To You all angels cry aloud, the heavens and all the powers therein. To You cherubim and seraphim continually do cry.” Thus, we remember the *Countless Saints who have been Saved by the Lamb*, giving praise to the Lamb who washed us in His blood as we sing, “You are the king of glory, O Christ; You are the everlasting Son of the Father.” You are our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who guides us to springs of living water, who leads us to the green pastures of heaven, who leads us on the path of righteousness that we may stand around the throne of God with all our brothers and sisters in Christ, glorifying and praising God. In the name of Jesus Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.