

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) (2021)

Countless are the Saints Saved by the Lamb

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“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)

On each Lord’s Day we recite the Proper Preface, stating when we worship, we worship with the angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven lauding and magnifying God’s holy name. However, on this glorious celebration of All Saints Day, we confess in the Proper Preface that: *“It is truly meet, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God. In the communion of all Your saints gathered into the one body of Your Son, You have surrounded us with so great a cloud of witnesses that we, encouraged by their faith and strengthened by their fellowship, may run with perseverance the race that is set before us and, together with them, receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying.”*

Think of it, we are the communion of God’s saints, gathered into the one, holy body of God’s beloved Son, Jesus Christ. One body, that is one communion, one koinonia, all of one mind, one confession, joined not only because we worship together, but by our worship service. Here, in God’s house of prayer we are joined by Word and Sacrament and made each to be members of the body of Christ. We are the Church militant, the Church on earth, who are joined by the saints in heaven, the Church Triumphant, on every Lord’s Day.

Article VII of the Augsburg Confessions states that the Church, *“is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel.”* By this confession we are stating that we who confess the faith of the Reformation fathers are those who stand in the tradition of the historic apostolic faith, we confess the faith of the apostolic fathers, proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, in Word and Sacrament we proclaim the truth that one is justified by grace alone through faith alone. When we worship, we are strengthened and forgiven by the Marks of the Church; the Gospel spoken, the Gospel of Baptism, the Gospel of Holy Communion, and the Gospel of Absolution. Held in the palm of God’s hand through His Gospel blessings, we are joined with all the saints in heaven who have preceded us. What a glorious realization this is for we who call ourselves followers of Jesus Christ, Christians, brothers, and sisters in Christ, who make up the communion of saints.

Saints: what a wonderful sound that word has as it rings in a believer’s ear. We confess, *“I believe in the communion of saints.”* These words of the Apostles’ Creed are particularly meaningful to us on All Saints Day Saints, which testifies that according to the New Testament we are those who are in Christ Jesus.

Saint has been the title of a believer since the beginning of the Christian church. Through his epistles, St. Paul speaks to the saints in the churches at Rome, Corinth, Colossae, Thessalonica,

Philippi, and Ephesus. Saints are the people of God who suffer with human weaknesses and shortcomings, who struggle in a world that is as hostile to them as it was to our Lord. We are saints and sinners simultaneously who while living on earth ***“share in the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col. 1:12 ESV)***; who fellowship with those who ***“have finished the race”*** who ***“have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7 ESV)***; who have received the crown of righteousness. Therefore, in Christ there is a blessed bond between the saints who are here in time and those who have already gone to glory. We remember the saints of this congregation whom God has called from this veil of tears into His heavenly kingdom of glory. Today, these saints who we knew and loved, stand with that great multitude of heaven, who make up the ***“great cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12:1 ESV)*** who await our reunion when God calls us into His heavenly Kingdom. Thus, we who are the people of God, the body of Christ, united in faith through Word and Sacrament ministry, made one through that communion, await with eager anticipation the blessed reunion with the saints who have preceded us, while being *encouraged by their faith and strengthened by their fellowship, we pray that we may run with perseverance the race that is set before us and, together with them, receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.*

What a great blessing it is to know that we are counted among the communion of saints. Each time we lose a family member or a friend who are counted among the communion of saints, God becomes a witness to our deep sorrow and grief. But He does not allow us to grieve as those who have no hope. No, His Word has given us a sure and certain faith in our eternal salvation won for us by His Son, Jesus Christ on the Altar of the Cross. Thus, we believe, teach, and confess there is a community of saints who have been called and gathered around Word and Sacrament ministry, a community of saints whose home is heaven, and this truth brings us abundant consolation in our time of grief as we mourn the temporary loss of a loved one. And I say temporary, because a day will come when we shall be reunited with those whom we love who are now beloved saints in heaven. A day will come when we shall all take our place, ***“standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in ... our ... hands, ... crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (vv. 9-10)***. How truly fortunate we are to be counted among the *Countless Saints Saved by the Lamb.*

But let us take the time to look at our communion, our congregation, and ask ourselves are we the only saints awaiting that reunion? Are there not more outside of our communion whom God has yet to call, those whom He desires to call through the voice of His saints in this place? Yes, indeed, there are countless numbers of those whom God desires to call, making them His saints, adding them to the great multitude, the great cloud of witnesses. This is why St. Paul asks, ***“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (Romans 10:14, ESV)***

And you respond, why yes pastor, that’s your job. You’re our preacher, so get to preaching. But I ask, are we not all the body of Christ? As such, are we not all responsible for the mission and ministry of the church? Yes, we are.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul speaks of our “spiritual gifts.” Gifts given to every believer by the Holy Spirit for building up the body of Christ. To be sure, Scripture says not all are pastors, but all are responsible for the growth of the body of Christ. Evangelism is the responsibility of every member of the body of Christ, therefore, every member of this congregation. For you, evangelism is you telling others of the Good News of life in Jesus Christ. It is you telling others of your joy of being a child of God, of being one who is justified by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. This is who you are and who you should desire others to be. Friends, family, strangers you meet. Therefore, every time

you have the opportunity to proclaim your faith, to proclaim the Good News of life in Christ to others, as one who is in communion with the Lord, you should not pass it by.

But you say, pastor, I'm not qualified. I don't know Holy Scripture well enough. I can't quote chapter and verse, nor do I know which Bible passage to refer to in every situation. Ok, you're not a theologian, one trained through a seminary education where God's Word is studied and learned not only in our language but in the language of the ancients, the original language of Scripture. But you are not asked to be a theologian, but only to be a believer who knows the Scriptures and our Confessions well enough to fulfill your calling as a child of God. If you feel you are lacking in these areas, the church offers weekly courses in Bible and catechetical training. So in addition to learning from the pulpit, you also have the opportunity to learn through Bible class, catechism, and daily devotions. Each of these means is meant to teach you what God has to say about faith, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the church's ecumenical Creeds, the Office of the Keys, and Confession and Absolution. Thus, refreshed in these subjects, you are fortified to go forth and proclaim the Good News of the Gospel to others. But if you don't take advantage of these additional venues for growth in the Christian faith, your witness may not be what you want it to be, and worse, it may not be what God wants it to be.

Therefore, on this All Saints Day, I ask you to focus on those who are saints in waiting. Souls who will be drawn to the Lord and given the gift of faith to believe in the Atoning Sacrifice of Jesus upon the Altar of the Cross by having heard the blessed Word of the Gospel. Focus on those who will be confirmed and held in that faith through Word and Sacrament ministry, who join with you in the communion of saints around Word and Sacrament ministry. This is the church's command from our Lord Jesus, to go and make disciples, to baptize them and to teach them all that He has commanded. That is, to keep them in the faith through the study of His Word, especially the Gospel through which the Holy Spirit endows the hearer with faith, that same gift and helper which leads you as you evangelize others that they may be added to the family of saints.

In our text for today, St. John gives us a glimpse of life in heaven, a life of continuous worship of God and the Lamb of God, which harkens to our liturgical worship, where we stand before the altar of God in this place and before the Lamb eager to receive from Him what He most desires to give us, His forgiveness, and He does not disappoint. Here, in the assembly of angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven we are forgiven and fed the Bread of Heaven, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Here we receive His true body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion and thereby remain in communion with Him as He comes to us giving Himself to us for the forgiveness of our sins and the strengthening of our faith. Here we assemble as the people of God, one body, one communion, one koinonia with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Outside of heaven there is no more blessed worship.

Since our Lord's crucifixion, the portal of heaven has been opened to all who believe in His Atoning Sacrifice for the forgiveness of their sins. To all who confess with their mouths and believe in their hearts that Jesus is Lord. How truly wonderful it is on this glorious All Saints Day to be reminded of our heavenly status, saints, even though we are still sinners, and how truly wonderful it is to be reminded that we are in communion with the saints who are already in heaven. Wonderful indeed are the *Countless Saints who are Saved by the Lamb*. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

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