

November 6, 2016

All Saints Day

“Living Toward the Resurrection”

Based on LSB #677 “For All the Saints”

I love that hymn. It is a triumphant song; a tribute to those Christians who have gone before us and are great examples of the faith and, of course, a hymn of praise to the Savior whose sacrifice makes us holy saints of God.

It’s a great hymn to use in observance of All Saints Day, but it’s also of long hymn. I was going to have us sing all eight verses at once just to make that point, but I thought better of it. This is a great hymn and I hope that by splitting it up folks are able to stay a bit more alert about the words they’re singing. Singing all the verses at once you might get tired.

We do get tired as Christians. The sanctified life is a constant struggle; a constant battle. At best we’re constantly fighting the distractions the world tries to foist upon us as so important when in the eternal scheme of things they’re meaningless. At worst we’re fighting Satan himself, throwing temptations and challenges at our weak spots trying to get us first to doubt, then to deny God’s love for us. And all the while we’re wrestling with our own sinful nature, sometimes winning, sometimes losing, but always working to be the holy child of God Christ has made us by virtue of our Baptism. It’s tiring.

And we all know what it’s like to be tired. Last week we had the run up to Fall Fest, then the Fest itself. I think a lot of folks were thinking about one thing at the end of the night: sleep, rest, just stopping.

We can think the same way about our Christian life. We sing, “For all the saints, who from their labors rest...” and it almost seems that the rest is the goal. We just want to run the race as St. Paul says, reach the finish line of life, and sleep, rest, be done with the struggle. The goal becomes to get it over with; to just...be...done. The goal becomes getting to verse six of the hymn: “The golden evening brightens in the west; soon, soon to faithful warriors cometh rest; sweet is the calm of paradise the blest. Alleluia! Alleluia!”

I see this way too often at funerals. Aunt Margie has passed away and the family is milling around and talking about how her suffering is over and she is with Jesus and at peace. That’s not wrong. Aunt Margie was redeemed by Christ’s blood. The Gospel promise stands true. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. If Aunt Margie believed and was baptized she was good to go and is at peace with Jesus. She’s at rest.

But that’s not the goal! That’s not the end game! Too often folks at funerals—Christian folks—seem to think “so-and-so had a good run. They’re with Jesus now. Let’s dump them in a hole and move on. Nothing more to see here.”

There is a danger with All Saints Day. We mark those who have finished their earthly race, and we may think that’s all there is. We may think the goal is rest. I think that’s a problem, because when the goal is rest, are you excited about it? Are you in eager anticipation of unconsciousness? No. You’re more focused on just making the long day stop than you are of looking joyfully toward what is at the end of it. That might be fine for a long day of work, but it’s a lousy way to live the Christian life.

I want everyone to listen closely to this statement and know that it is true: There is something wrong with all of the saints resting with Jesus right now. They are defective. They are not right. They are in a bad way. They are dead.

Now don't get me wrong. They are saved. They are the blessed Jesus speaks of in the beatitudes who have the kingdom of heaven. They are holy saints. But they're dead saints. They are stuck at verse six! If you wonder why I always insist on singing all the verses of the hymns, this is one great example why. If you don't get to verse seven, you miss the goal! You miss the end game.

"But, lo, there breaks a yet more glorious day: The saints triumphant rise in bright array; The King of Glory passes on His way. Alleluia! Alleluia!" And into verse eight: "From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast, through gates of pearl streams in the countless host, singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Alleluia! Alleluia!"

That vision in Revelation we read of that "*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 in white robes,*" that's not the saints resting with Jesus! They are standing around the throne—**standing!** They have their bodies back. This is a picture of the Last Day and beyond into eternity when the souls of the dead resting with Jesus are restored and transformed into glorified, resurrected, ever-living human bodies!

Yes, we Christians want to run our race well and die in the faith. But that's not the goal. That's not the end game. When Jesus says "blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, the thirsting for righteousness, the pure in heart, etc. etc.," He is not saying they are blessed to have a blessed death; He is saying they have a blessed life, with Him, forever!

It's important we understand this. It's important because we're living in the midst of the great tribulation. In our spiritual battles with the temptations of Satan, the fallen world and our own sinful nature are we going to be more energized for battle if we think that the finish line is to die and get it over with or if we know the truth that the climax is abundant perfect life and perfect joy in the presence of Christ?

Perhaps you are facing frustration in your family, career or just life in general. Will you be more hopeful thinking you just have to live until you die, or if you know that you're bound for a life wherein all frustrations and relationships stand not only healed, but perfected?

I know lots of us are facing physical trials, debilitating diseases, some of us afflictions that are in fact bringing us to our very death. Will you take joy in thinking, "This is as good as it gets—it's all downhill from here, and then I die?" No! The joy of a Christian is knowing that this body that is now weak, sickly, tired and betraying me unto death will be resurrected in Christ! This whatever it is that plagues me—it shall be made whole and right! Just as **He** rose perfect and eternal never to die again, so shall I. And I shall dwell, body and soul, in the house of the Lord forever.

Now I just want to punctuate one important point that must not be overlooked here. In His first and last beatitudes Jesus does not speak in the future tense. He says of the poor in spirit and those persecuted for righteousness sake: theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven. This awesome life in Christ is not only a future thing. You received it already in your Holy Baptism, in the Word, in the supper. It is not something you attain. It is not something you earn. It is your possession this very day. You are a Saint.

Thus we are in communion with all the saints. Both those who have run their earthly race in faith and are now at rest with Christ, and we who still fight the good fight amidst the evil of a fallen creation; we are all anxiously awaiting the same thing—the Last Day, the return of Christ in glory, the completion of the plan of salvation. It belongs to all of us now, and not yet.

So brothers and sisters in Christ, have faith in Christ. He has given you the victory. Live in Him. Live not toward the death and rest of the saints in heaven. Live toward the resurrection and the life in Jesus. Amen.