

“Eternal Life Has Already Begun”

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

When we think about our life, we devote the majority of our attention to the physical world, the temporary, mundane existence in which we live. Reason tells us that it makes sense to pay attention to the physical world, because this is the only world that we can see, hear, touch, or taste. But this physical, temporary world is the lesser part of God’s creation. During these last weeks of the church year, as God’s people, we focus our attention on the end of time, the end of this world, the coming of Christ, and our entering into eternity.

But our eternal life with God is not something that we are simply sitting and waiting around to see. In Baptism, that rebirth through water and the Word began our eternal life in Christ. And from the time of our Baptism, until the Lord calls us home, we are in the world, but not of the world, as Scripture says. And our eternal life has begun.

It doesn’t mean we are already in heaven. This world has no glory compared to that which surrounds the Lord. Listen to the prophet Daniel’s vision of the end. The Ancient of Days with His throne flaming with fire; thousands upon thousands serving Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stand before Him. When you take a step back and try to imagine what that

looks like, for me, it is overwhelming. When God is described as “awesome,” this is what that word historically means.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus tells us that all of creation will be shaken. Not even the sun, the moon, and the stars will survive. The Son of Man will come with power and glory that this temporary world has never seen.

In these final weeks of the church year, we are compelled to contemplate that which our sinful nature most wants to avoid – the end of life on earth. Our human nature loves the concept of youth. Our human nature loves all that is new and shiny. The stores are filled with products advertised to make you look or feel younger – and we are more than willing to buy them.

By nature, no one enjoys making out a will or buying life insurance. We don’t want to think about the end of this life. But, because of sin, this life will end and this world will end. No matter how we try to avoid that reality, we are reminded that even heaven and earth will pass away. Nothing in all the first creation will last, except for the Word of God. Jesus says, “My words will never pass away.”

If the events of this life, if the experiences or current realities of your life bring distress or fear, if your world has been or is being shaken, remember that there is one place where you can find something that cannot be shaken, that will not grow old or tired or fade away. It is here that we most intimately experience the spiritually charged world in which we live, and participate with that great cloud of witnesses with which we are surrounded as we gather

with angels, arch-angels, and all the company of heaven.

God's House is a pretty special place. Here we are fed with the greatest of food. Here we are instructed with the best of all words. Here we are truly made new to a greater degree than even any late night infomercial could promise. But Christ's Church is made of people, not wood and stone.

In Baptism, we experience more than just an initiation into church membership; and it is more than just a christening – it is much more than just a ceremony where a name is given to a child. And the giving of a name like Martin Roger Eden is not the most important name given at a Baptism. In Baptism, we receive the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is into the family of God that Baptism brings us. And what joy there is among God's people as we see the fruit of the Gospel blossoming among us.

But we are reminded that as the seed of the Word blossoms into life, and we see that life nourished and grow through the work of God and His Church; we are reminded that there will be a harvest – there will be a gathering.

It is here that we prepare for that final gathering – when the court will be seated and the books will be opened. That day will have all the outward trappings of the most dramatic courtroom drama ever. But for God's baptized faithful children, there is no drama, because the final outcome is already known – your name will be read from the Lamb's Book of Life.

I really like this mini season at the end of the church year. On this All Saint's Day, along with the saints on earth, we remember those who began their eternal life in Baptism, walked among the faithful within Christ's Church, participated in Christ's body and blood, who still participate with us and the angels and archangels as we gather today, and who now have taken their place at the feast which has no end – waiting and watching for Christ to return and usher in the resurrection of all flesh.

In Baptism, our eternal life began. Through Christ's death and resurrection, we have eternal life. Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and life. . . He who believes in Me will never die."

There will come a day when the Church on earth and the Church Triumphant will become one. Until then, the Church on earth and the Church Triumphant are united in the common bond of the body and blood of Christ.

Beginning on All Saint's Day, during this time of year, we spend a little extra time remembering those who have departed this life. But we do so in the sure knowledge that we share a common union and communion with them. They are in the physical presence of the crucified and resurrected Christ. We are in the physical presence of the crucified and resurrected Christ. And with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify God's glorious name. And we pray, "Thy Kingdom Come." Amen.