

“Precious in the Sight of the Lord is the Death of His Saints”

Revelation 7:9-17

The Psalmist cries out: “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints” [Ps. 116:15]. Today, is not technically All Saints’ Day, that was on November 1st. But the first Sunday in November is always set aside so that the church may honor those who died in the faith. Today is the day that we especially remember that great cloud of witnesses that surround us [Heb. 12:1]. “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Each Sunday, the final petition of our general prayers is a prayer remembering those saints who have gone before us. We talked about this in our Sunday morning Bible class last week, as we have been spending some time talking about death, dying, and what has become and will become of the saints.

There are saints, the holy ones of God who have been welcomed into His proximity in the heavenly kingdom because Christ rose victorious over death and the grave. Death is defeated, and a big part of celebrating All

Saints' Day is that we remember the faithful who trusted in Christ, whose tears are gone, and whose sorrows our Lord has turned to joy.

For those faithful children of God who are with the Lord, their burden and sorrow has ended. We are the ones who are still in the great tribulation. We are the ones who still have tears and sorrows. There is irony that long life is acknowledged as a blessing from God throughout Scripture, yet Enoch and Elijah being taken out of this life is universally regarded as a blessing from God. And don't forget what St. Paul says, "To live is Christ, to die is gain . . . I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far."

To be a saint on earth, and dwell within the peace and protection of the Holy Christian Church, and to participate in the communion of saints, and the forgiveness of sins, and looking to the eternity of our life everlasting is a blessing beyond compare – beyond compare except for the actual reality of life everlasting.

The reality is that unless the Lord returns first, this life will end. The Psalmist says: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." Listen carefully to those words. The death of a saint is precious in God's sight. The dead in Christ were saints before they died. Those who went through the great tribulation and died in faith had already had their robes washed clean in the blood of the Lamb long before their last breath was drawn. Our robes are washed white in the blood of Christ in our Baptism.

We have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

We are God's saints already. St. Paul tells us that we were crucified with Christ. Our old self died with Him on the cross. And we have been raised to a new life. We need never fear death again. Christ says: "I am the resurrection and the life...He who believes in Me will never die."

During our prayers today, as we do each All Saint's Day, we will list those members of our church who, during the past 12 months, were called out of this life and into the next. These brothers and sisters have run the good race, have reached the goal set out for them, and have been given the crown of life.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." In His mercy and through His wisdom, the Lord has taken death, the ultimate, angry, awful enemy of mankind; He has taken this curse and punishment that we deserve as a child of Adam and further deserve through our unholy thoughts, words, and deeds; and He has turned it into the vehicle by which He brings us into the perfect fellowship and perfect relationship that He intended for us all along.

Death is still an enemy of the will of God. Death is not a natural part of life. Death is violent and is the wage that our sin has earned. But death is a defeated enemy. And God works all things for the good of His people, as St. Paul reminds us.

All Saint's Day is not a day to celebrate death, but is a day to celebrate our life in Christ – whether we are celebrating the eternal life of those with Christ in heaven or our life in Christ that we have as baptized saints on earth. There is really no difference. The elect in Christ, the baptized faithful, have already received eternal life. As our Lord said, "He who believes in Me will never die."

We have already experienced death. In Baptism, our old self, our Old Adam, was crucified with Christ. We died to sin. We are a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come. We have washed our robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

We have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Through our Baptism, we are washed clean of all impurity and invited into the family of God. Because our life on earth is filled with great tribulation, we continually come to hear God's Word and be nourished with the body and blood of the Lamb. It is here that God's saints on earth are made holy as we are blessed with proximity to God and we gather around the Lord's Table with angels and arch-angels and all the company of heaven.

And finally, when our last hour comes, we look forward with confidence knowing that when these eyes close for the last time, they will be opened to see our Savior's face. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. Amen.