

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Pentecost 24 – All Saints’
Saturday, November 6, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, November 7, 2021 at 9:00 a.m.

“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, the church honors 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 the ones coming 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. Because Christ rose victorious over death and the grave, we remember the faithful who trusted in Christ, whose tears are gone, and whose sorrows have turned to joy. Today, we will begin our prayers with remembering those faithful departed.

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 Saints' Day, we will list those from our church who, during the past 12 months, were called out of this life and into the next. These are they who have finished the journey and reached the goal set out for them, and we confidently look to Christ that they 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 earn through our sin; 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 angry judge. Death is not a natural part of life. Death is not our friend. Death is violent and is the wage that our sin has earned. But God works all things for the good of His people, as St. Paul reminds us.

All Saints' Day and the Eve of All Saints' Day is not a time to celebrate death, but is a time to celebrate our life in Christ. The world around us has chosen to corrupt this holy festival and decorate their homes with images of death and darkness. I spent much of Monday (which was actually All Saints' Day – November 1) researching the history of All Saints' Day, and the Eve of this festival popularly called Halloween.

It is really hard to find good information because, like Christmas and Easter, there are numerous theories about how the Christian church simply took pagan rituals and made them our own. I won't bore you with the details. In my

research, three things were abundantly clear. First, it is good to celebrate the life and new life of the saints (both those in heaven and those on earth). That should be our primary thought today. It is good to celebrate life as a saint. After all, Christ has made this possible.

The second thing I realized in my study is that our society is not the first to be fascinated by and intrigued by the thoughts of evil spirits manifesting themselves and bringing horror and death. The fringe of God's people have always been fascinated by the pagans on the other side of that line.

Israel embraced Baal and other false gods. Medieval Christians embraced superstitions about spirits and false ideas about Christ. This generation in America has embraced horror as a genre, and fascination with zombies, and the occult, and death. Halloween, as it is currently celebrated by many, is just a visible embrace of the most blatant part of paganism. It should not surprise us that a culture which does not hold life to be precious, would be fascinated in telling stories and sharing images of gruesome death – even decorating one's yard with such images.

The third thing which I find to be self-evident is that it's OK for your kids to dress up like Spiderman or a Disney princess and beg for candy from the neighbors. Even though parents always regret it when putting kids to bed who are on their sugar high, and 4 out 5 dentists do not approve, yet we can exercise our Christian freedom.

The history of going from door to door on this holiday has both a holy and unholy past. Dressing up on the Eve of All Saints' has both a holy and unholy past. But Trick-or-Treating was not widely practiced in America (and relatively unknown in the Eastern half of the United States) until after the 1952 Disney cartoon called "Trick or Treat" was viewed by all the children. So if you don't

like how the Eve of All Saints' is celebrated, you can blame Walt Disney.

The reality is that throughout the generations, there have been many who take All Saints' and the Eve of All Saints' and misuse it. Just like not everyone celebrates Christmas and Easter for the real reason for the season.

Just like Christmas and Easter, All Saints' Day is a celebration of life and the resurrection. It is a celebration of Jesus and what He has done. We are saints who will live forever. As the elect in Christ, the baptized faithful, you have already received eternal life. As our Lord said, "He who believes in Me will never die."

The only death we will truly ever have is the one we have already experienced in Baptism when our old self was drowned in the water and the Word, washed in the blood of the Lamb, and crucified with Christ. We died to sin. We are a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come, as St. Paul says. 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. Christ is with us even as those who have come out of the great tribulation are with Christ. The connection we have with them is Christ. 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.

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.