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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

All Saints' Day – Observed

November 6, 2016

Text: Matthew 5:1–12

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Dear saints of God, things are really starting to feel different. Our world is changing right before our eyes. What was unthinkable just a few years ago is now promoted with an almost religious zeal and ferocity. We, the Christian Church, are coming to terms with the truth that our culture no longer supports Christian morality. It can't even support that which had been taken for granted for all of human history: such things like boys are boys and girls are girls; that boys grow to become men and girls grow to become women; that each sex is unique and that uniqueness is good and proper; that in most cases, a man and a woman commit themselves to each other unreservedly in marital union and have children; that children are a good and blessed gift that ought not be destroyed but cherished and loved; that government is a noble institution to be honored both by those who govern and those who are governed. So much has changed. But then again...not much has changed.

The days of the early Roman Empire in which the Christian Church grew and flourished are remarkably similar to the 21st century. To be sure, the ancients understood that boys were boys and girls were girls but those biological facts didn't inform and guide their sexual morality. Every form of deviancy known today was practiced and celebrated 2,000 years ago. To be sure, the ancients knew that marriage could only be between a man and a woman. But marriage was valued primarily as being the means of transferring property and wealth from one generation to the next; it wasn't an institution of sacrificial love and devotion to family, friends, and country. If the housefather didn't like the looks of a newborn child, he could – without any legal or social repercussion – destroy the child. We think this election cycle to be distasteful! Imagine being ruled by pedophiles, sodomites, and cowards. Such were various Roman emperors including the likes of Tiberius, Nero, Commodus and others. The moral character of our current presidential candidates looks downright impeccable compared to these men.

The holy Christian Church of the Lord Jesus Christ has known difficult times. Saints of God, our forefathers in the faith have walked this road before. By God's grace and

through faith in His Christ, they overcame the assaults of the world and the devil with all their evil. This victorious Christian Church is described for us in Revelation 7 as “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 with white robes... (vs. 9)” In glorious victory, they proclaim majestic praise as they sing, “salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (vs. 10).

We will consider this faithful multitude of believers for the remainder of our time. On this All Saints’ Sunday, we will draw strength and encouragement from their example even as we are quickened by grace of the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. In vs. 14, one of the 24 heavenly elders says three things about this glorious multitude, “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” (vs. 14).

First, this glorious group is constantly growing through time. It is made up of Christians who are coming – notice the present, on-going tense of that word – out of the great tribulation. As long as time continues on this side of eternity, redeemed saints will continue to come into this majestic band. And so we confess in the Nicene Creed, “I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic church.” We, the saints of God on earth, share in the same eternal life with the saints in heaven. This mystic, sweet communion, as one hymn puts it, transcends time and space. For wherever Christ is, there His people are united together in Him.

Second, the ranks of the heavenly multitude are made up of redeemed saints coming out of the great tribulation. That’s what the Lord Jesus calls the days before His return in Matthew 24:21, a great tribulation. The holy Christian Church has always faced difficult days. In times of relative peace, there is always the danger of lethargy and indifference to the holy things of God. In times of persecution and opposition, there is the danger of apostasy and defections. Most Christians throughout Church history have experienced one or both types of danger. The Church has always had to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.

It seems to me that we are leaving a relative time of peace and entering into a time of greater opposition. In some countries, it is a hot, intense form of persecution. God’s saints are murdered, robbed, thrown into jail, ridiculed, and beaten. Their testimony of faith in the living Lord Jesus is costing them their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor. This is why I have made a conscientious effort to include all persecuted Christians in our Sunday prayers; I encourage you to do the same.

In this country, opposition to God's people is growing as Christians are being fired from their jobs for not promoting sin and evil. Some are being taken to court and sued for their refusal to deny their most holy faith. Christian non-profit organizations are being forced to either violate the historic teachings of the Christian Church (and their own teachings which they have held to for centuries) or close their doors. This may be the next great age of martyrdom. Tertullian, a 3rd century Christian writer, boldly declared, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." But do not despair, saints of God.

There is yet a third characteristic that we must hasten to consider. The heavenly elder said this multitude had "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Have you noticed that I keep calling you saints of God? This is the reason why. You are the ones wearing blood washed robes of purity and holiness. You are saints of God because you are baptized into the Lord Jesus Christ; you are holy because you hear His Gospel promise of justification unto eternal life; you are holy because you are nourished with the holy body and blood of God's Lamb, the Lord Jesus.

No matter what the world throws at you, no matter how fierce the battle becomes, the blood of Jesus cleanses you. You are His beloved saints, now and for all eternity. I know quite well what you might be thinking. But pastor, if you only knew my life, if you only knew how contaminated by thoughts and intentions are you wouldn't be so bold as to declare me to be a saint. To this I say, God's Word speaks better things of you.

The apostle John writes (I John 3:1), "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are." How can I speak of you in any other way than God's beloved children? To be God's child, is to be a holy saint. So says verse 3, "And everyone who thus hopes in him (i.e., Jesus) purifies himself as he (i.e., Jesus) is pure." Yes, saints of God, you are those who hope in Christ and are made pure through His blood. You are as pure as Jesus for He is your hope and your eternal reward. Without a doubt, you are God's saints.

One final word about all those struggles I described at the beginning. The Lord's apostles and the ancient Church faced all the difficulties of living in a culture that was completely given over to sexual deviancy, that held marriage in low esteem, and that knew corruption at all levels of government. It was in the midst of that kind of environment that the inspired words of the New Testament were written. In other

words, the New Testament was not written in a time of ease and comfort but one of struggle and opposition, days very similar to our own.

Regarding the fact that we live in a sexually deviant culture:

³For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God (I Thessalonians 4:3–5).

Regarding the fact that we live in a culture that devalues and corrupts marriage:

⁴Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous (Heb. 13:4).

²²Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord...²⁵Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...³²This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. ³³However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband (Ephesians 5: 22, 25, 32 – 33).

Regarding the fact that we live in a culture that has many politicians with questionable morality and uncertain faith:

¹Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God...
⁶For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing (Romans 13: 1, 6).

All of these beautiful and powerful words were written to saints of God gathered in congregations for the purpose of hearing God's Word and receiving the Lord's Holy Supper. Just like us today!! Our forefathers endured the same trials that we face. And they overcame because they were washed in the blood of the Lamb. We too shall overcome. For we are saints of God, clothed in blood washed robes of holiness and truth. In Christ, our victory and triumph is secure.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.