

On the feast of All Saints we celebrate the work of Christ in his people. Just as on any Saint's day we do not glorify the man or woman for whom the day is named, rather we give praise to God for what he has accomplished in one of his children, so also on the feast of All Saints we praise God for the innumerable Christian disciples who have been transformed into the likeness of Christ. This day is set aside in gratitude for the many unknown and unnamed saints who have been transformed by the renewing of their minds, going from glory to greater glory in the worship of God.

In the gospel lesson for today we read Our Lord's description of a saint. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons<sup>a</sup> of God. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The Beatitudes present what it means to be great in the kingdom of God. Perhaps unsurprisingly greatness in heaven is almost exactly the inverse of the world's notion of greatness. The world would say, blessed are the wealthy both in body and spirit, but our Lord says blessed are the poor in spirit. Which is to say Blessed are those who know their need for God, and are not satisfied with the comforts of this life. The world says blessed are the happy, Christ says blessed are those who mourn, for they also will receive a comfort and peace which comes from heaven, rather than earthly pleasures. Blessed are the meek and the merciful, not those with power and influence to demand what they will. Blessed are the pure in heart, not those who satisfy every appetite which the flesh develops. Blessed are the persecuted, because they are earning an eternal glory, in comparison of which, the sufferings of this life are not even worth mentioning.

For how is the great multitude in heaven described. Those unnumbered saints who stand in the very throne room of God and offer praise, what is the unifying feature of this great throng? "And he said unto me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Tribulation is the calling card of the saints in heaven. Why? Is it that in order to be a Saint you must

experience some great hardship in your life? Should we seek out suffering in order to receive the heavenly reward? No. But to walk through this life of sin and death as a Christian is to do battle – is to come through great tribulation. We are each given a battle to fight. There is no question whether or not you will face tribulation as a Christian in this world. There will be external sorrows and trials, but perhaps greatest of all will be the tribulation which is a contest with your own sin.

When I was a child, my mother read us a book called Teddy's Button. It was a story about a pugnacious little boy, who was in search of an enemy in order to demonstrate his strength and courage. He was always ready for a fight, but the local parson convinced him that the greatest fight was against the enemy in his own heart – the old man of sin. A contest with his fleshly desires and the lies of the devil was a much greater and harder fight than any external bully could offer.

Similarly, in Christ's passion we see a war being waged. Each passive step which our Lord takes along the road of sorrows toward the cross, is in fact a strong advance against the enemy's position. Our Lord is marching to war as he bears the cross up the hill. The meekness of the lamb is also the fierceness of the Lion of Judah. He is at war with the temptations of his humanity, but even more so he is contending against Death and the Devil.

Each saint in the Kingdom of God has engaged this same battle, this same tribulation. We are at war. The image of heaven which St. John relates is the great celebration of peace and victory. That awaits us, yet now we are at war. It would behoove us to recall that medals of honor are not won during peace time. Now is the time to engage the contest with courage. The crowns which we earn in these days will be well worth the pain.

And all the Saint's who have gone before us now, stand by to encourage us by their witness and stories and by their prayers. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." This also is why we celebrate All Saints. We ought to recall that we are being cheered on by those Saints in glory. They are a testament to the good will of God. He will carry to completion the work which he has begun in us.

It is easy to become fatigued in the Christian life. We are discouraged by our own failings and slowed by our fleshly inclinations. How often have we fallen short of the perfection to which we are called. How daunting it seems to think of trying again. But let us not weary of well-doing. The Lord, even today, offers forgiveness and restoration. We will presently confess our sins and then be invited to the communion of Christ. This is the heavenly feast. In Holy Communion we join with the great throng in heaven at the common table of Christ's eternal self-offering. To be a saint is nothing more and nothing less than to be united to the life of Christ. That is what God accomplishes in the Lord's Supper. We here join with the whole church, past present and future, as one body, and are enlivened by the one life of Christ which redeems and reforms us.

Let us then prepare our hearts in gratitude. Let us fix our eyes on eternity, setting our hope not on earthly comfort but upon the glory which will be revealed. For there "he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."