

Sermon Rev 7 9-17 23rd S af Pent Series B

Sermon: 23rd Sunday after Pentecost – All Saints Sunday

Text: Revelation 7:9-17

Theme: The saints of God

Goal: To lift our eyes to God's revelation about His saints

Dear Saints in Christ,

Introduction: Do the Lutherans believe in Saints? Do we have Saints in our church? Why do we celebrate “All Saints Day”? To be very honest with you: As I can remember, this is the very first time I celebrate All Saints day as a pastor... and I'm now pastor at a “*St. Thomas* Lutheran Church”...

What do you think a Saint is: Someone without sin? Yes! God is holy, without sin = a saint. In Portuguese we don't have two different words to describe holiness; we have only “Santo” or shortened: “São”, which means: saint or holy. God is “santo”; and we refer to “São Paulo”, “São Pedro”, “Santa Maria”, “Santo Antonio”... When we sing “Holy, Holy, Holy”, we sing: “Santo, Santo Santo...”

A saint: someone without sin. We acknowledge and confess that we are sinners. Even so, the Apostle Paul calls the Christian to whom he addressed his letters as saints. He begins his letter to the Ephesians: “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the *saints* in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus.” Here is the secret: “the faithful in Christ Jesus”. By faith in Jesus, who forgives our sins, we are seen as saints in the eyes of God, His beloved children, as we read in 1 John 3:1: “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”

But All Saints Day doesn't refer to us, as saints in Christ. All Saints Day, in the correct sense as we understand it, lifts our eyes to the blessed Christians who already have reached the goal of our faith, the heaven, to the departed ones, to the forgiven sinners who are in the presence of God forever, the Saints of God!

I – Who are these?

The apostle John and the Christian Church had very hard times at the end of the 1st Century. Nero and other Roman Emperors were persecuting the Christians, killing many of them. The Book of Revelation shows the battle of the enemies against God's people. John himself, at a very old age (close to or even over 90 years old), was put into exile in the island of Patmos. There God showed him that the enemies would try to destroy the church of God; but the final victory is of the Lamb, the resurrected Jesus! His life is the guarantee for eternal life to the Christians, even if they suffer martyrdom. And God opens a window to heaven for John look inside and see what is happening there!

The vision of our text, Revelation 7, is one of my favorite ones. John saw “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” - “ From every nation, tribe, people and language” means that no one is excluded from God's salvation. Six times this sequence appears in Revelation: “from every nation, tribe, people and language”. If we have sometimes relationship problems because of language, or skin color, or traditions, etc. etc., God doesn't have any problem. He loves the world, the entire world, and He wants to save people of any origin.

John was not suppose to have any doubt about God's eternal plan for the Christians, even for the persecuted Christians. Therefore one of the elders in heaven asked John: “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?” - I answered, “Sir, you know.” - And he said, “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.” “The blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin” wrote John in 1 John 1:7. Everyone who believes in Jesus is purified by His blood shed on the cross and will be with God in heaven after this life. These are the Saints that we remember and honor on All Saints Day! Not only the martyrs, not only the apostles, not only the old church's fathers and faithful women who are

called as “Saints”, but every one who had cleansed his dirty sinful clothes in the blood of Jesus. This means: All our beloved departed ones who believed in Christ are part of this great multitude standing before the throne of God! What a hope! What a comfort! What a blessing! What a All Saints Day celebration!

II – How is their life in heaven?

The elder who was talking to John explained it better what it means to be there standing before the throne of God. The description that follows lifts our eyes to the hope that is expecting us as well. Ten (10) statements describe the blessed situation of the saints:

The first three describe the blessedness of believers in the presence of God. “they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.” Two of the readings for today highlighted this blessedness:

1 John 3:2 says: “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He (Jesus) appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall *see* Him as He is!” And in the Beatitudes Jesus said: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will *see* God” (Matthew 5:8).

The next four depict the freedom of God's people from the effect of sin: “Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat.”

The last three give the source of their bliss (CSSC) : “For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

I love this text! When we mourn our beloved ones, - and we do it very often, because we miss them so much- we have to read this and other similar texts of the Bible and be renewed by God's promises, who never fail. And when hard times come for us too, especially on our death bed, we have to cling to God's promises in Christ and be sure that they are for us, His beloved children, His saints in the resurrected Christ!

Conclusion: The Saints are not to be adored or we shall not pray for them, as many do. John himself had that experience, because he became so amazed of what he was seeing. He wrote his experience in Revelation 22:8-9: “I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, “Don’t do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your fellow prophets and with all who keep the words of this scroll. Worship God!” The Saints are fellow servants with all Christians!

The Saints have to be remembered and honored. We cannot despise them. Hebrew 13:7-8 says: “Remember your leaders (the saints), who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” This is the reason why churches have names of the Saints, like we, “Saint Thomas”, remembering his struggle, his doubts, his faith, his ministry, and his victory by Jesus' grace. We give thanks for all the Saints, for the grace that God bestowed on them and on us, we study their lives to see their examples of faith and of obedience, and we follow the same Jesus, the Savior, who opened the gate of heaven to them and will open the gates of heaven to us when our time comes as well. This is our faith, this is our hope. Amen.

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