

Sermon: All Saints Day

Text: Revelation 7:1-17 (v. 13)

Theme: Who are the saints?

Goal: To encourage people to follow the steps of faith in Christ and of love to the neighbours shown by the saints

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Who are the saints we remember and honour on All Saints' Day? Are they special people who lived without sins, who lived a holy life? No, they are not. Only one was holy and without sins: Jesus Christ. Then what kinds of saints are we talking about? Who are they? They are all departed who died faithful to Christ and are now enjoying the eternal life in the presence of God. All Saints Day lifts our eyes to heaven, where they are; not to the tomb, where their bodies are lain. The readings for today highlight this truth and this hope. We are not just mourning our beloved who departed, but we are rejoicing in hope of the day when we will meet them again. And we can have this hope because of Jesus, who was laid in a tomb after He died on the cross, *rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father*, and He is preparing room for us.

- The text of Revelation shows a marvellous sight of Heaven with tens of thousands of saints gathered with the angels and all the hosts of heaven praising the Lord God Almighty! The Apostle John had the privilege to see this vision and he shares his great experience with us. To the question, "Who are the saints, and where did they come from?" - a good answer was given.

I – The Biblical Saints

- First of all, the saints in heaven are the apostles and prophets and all the biblical characters "who have come out of the great tribulation;

they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” We have St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, St. John, St. Thomas, St. Mary, St. Joseph, and so on.

- God had said through the prophet Isaiah ^(1:18): “Come now, let us reason together... Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” Even in the Old Testament time, this means, before Christ died on the cross, people were saved by faith in the blood of the Lamb who was to come. The sacrifices they used to perform pointed to the sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

- Hebrews 12:1 calls them as a “great cloud of witnesses” surrounding us. Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and several other men and women are mentioned as heroes of faith who were expecting the city in heaven. Jesus mentioned Abraham, Isaac and Jacob seated at the heavenly table. Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus on the Mount of the Transfiguration. People’s names are mentioned as being with God in heaven. Therefore we believe that all biblical characters that had faith in the Messiah are now in heaven, saints worshiping the Lord.

- They left us not only an example of faith, but an example of life as well. Their obedience to God and their love to the neighbour have to be imitated and followed. Therefore it is good to remember All Saints Day.

II- The Saints of the Church

- But we have more saints in heaven. They are all Christians “who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” We remember especially the martyrs of the Christian faith. Revelation 1:13 says: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, they will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them.”

- Great tribulation followed the Ascension of our Lord. The first Christians were persecuted and many of them were put to death. They are acknowledged by the Christian Church as “Saints” because they didn’t deny their faith in Jesus, but preferred to face humiliation and death. Some of them were highly honoured even while still alive, as Paul recommends to the Philippians about “Epaphroditus my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier... honour men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give to me” (Philippians 2:25, 29, 30). And Hebrews 13:7 says: “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”

- The saints are to be honoured and followed in their faith and in their way of life, but not to be worshiped. Worship belongs only to God, as He is worshiped by all the Saints and the angels in Revelation 7: “They cried out in a loud voice: Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb. Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen.”

III – The departed saints in our midst

- But we have even more saints in heaven, not just the apostles and the martyrs. John says: “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.” “Who are they, and where did they come from? ... 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.” It is an anticipation of the blessedness of the departed Christians from all around the world and of all times, - our beloved departed as well. The blood of Jesus shed on the

cross saved them from temptations and tribulations, forgave their sins and received them in the heavenly home. Therefore they can wear white robes and stand before the throne because they were cleansed by the blood of Jesus.

- No saint in heaven is better than the others. All of them received the same grace from God and the same benefit from the blood of Jesus. They all used to be sinners like us. They had all been washed from their sins in the Holy Baptism, they had been called to faith in Jesus through the Gospel, they had been strengthened in their faith by the body and blood of Jesus in the Holy Communion, and they had lived a life of obedience to God and of love to their neighbours.

- Conclusion: But the reason for celebrating All Saints Day is not just to look back to the departed ones, or to look up to the Christian hope, but to look to ourselves as well if we are in the right path to reach the Communion of Saints when we pass away. By faith in Jesus we are already part of the Communion of Saints on this earth, as we confess in the Apostles' Creed: *I believe...in the holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints*. The Communion of Saints joins Christians from the past and from the present, saints in heaven and saints on earth. We are saints because we are forgiven by the blood of Jesus. But we are living in this valley of tears and temptations and we are still sinners. All Saints Day wants to encourage us to be faithful and to follow the steps of faith in Christ and of love to the neighbours shown by the saints. The blood of Jesus is still available to cleanse us from all iniquities and to assure us that we are children of God, blessed ones by the grace of Jesus. Jesus promised: "In my father's house are many rooms. I am going there to prepare a place for you" (John 14:1, 2). Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 03 November 2013