

Sermon: 21st Sunday after Pentecost – All Saints Day

Text: 1 John 3:1-3

Theme: What we will be

Goal: To encourage people and to fill them with hope because of God's promises in Christ to His children

Dear Saints in Christ,

Introduction: "*What will you be when you grow up?*" is a common question addressed to children. And they dream: I will be a doctor, I will be a fireman, I will be a nurse, I will be a teacher... Even though they are not able to understand and to know what it means to be a doctor or a fireman or whatever, they speak and they dream.

What will you be in 50 years or in 90 years? Nothing but dust and ashes? No one will remember you anymore? No, we, as Christians, have a bigger hope. All Saints Day wants to lift up our eyes to a higher level and to dream a little bit about what God has prepared for His children. At Christmas, we talk about when the Son of God came to us and settled on our level on earth. At All Saints Day we talk about the time when we go to Him and will settle on His level in heaven with all the blessed departed.

I – The origin of All Saints Day

All Saints began to be commemorated in the 7th century. A Bible commentary (Phil Brandt) wrote: *It seems that as the temples of the pagans were emptied by the reality of Christian conversions, several of them were given to the Christian bishop in Rome. One of them was the Pantheon of Rome, a remarkable building which for many centuries was the largest dome in the west... Since it had been dedicated to all the gods (pan-theon in Greek), the bishop of Rome made a rather bold decision. It was dedicated to all the saints,*

especially the many martyrs who had died in Rome... Shortly thereafter... the Saxons, Frisians, and Vikings had only begun to be evangelized. They had pagan “day of the dead” sort of festival which fell at this time. (Halloween). We have to admit that some of this is speculation, but it appears the church moved the feast of All Saints to compete with this day of the dead festival which would fall on Nov 1.

Speculation or not, the reality is that there is a lot of misunderstanding about All Saints celebration: Some pray to the saints, some revere the forefathers as if they could help us, some are afraid of the souls of the departed as if they would be able to come back to contact us... As Christians, we have to cling to God’s promises about His Saints from then and from now – we among them – and rejoice *“with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven”* as we come together to celebrate God’s faithfulness to His children and to partake in His Holy Meal, - an anticipation of the Celestial Meal we will enjoy once in heaven with All the Saints!

II – What we are now

But for now we are still here on earth. Let’s first put our feet on the ground. What is our status now? Our text answers it in a marvellous way: “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!”

I stressed at the first part of the Reformation Sermon last Sunday that we are sinners and we “all fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). We know our weaknesses and sometimes we become deeply depressed because we don’t achieve the goals we set for our Christian life. We are far from perfection. But on the other hand, we can never forget the huge privilege God gives us when He calls us “His beloved children”. This totally changes our status. From *“poor, miserable sinners”*, we are declared “children of God”, forgiven on

behalf of Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross for us. It is just a matter of faith: If you believe it, you have it and you are a beloved son of God. If you don't believe it, you don't have it and you still remain in your sins.

III – What we will be

But the story doesn't end here. God has bigger promises for His children. Our text 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 appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” What we will be is still God's secret. How it will be in heaven, how the saints are living, is not fully disclosed by God. He opened some small windows in the Bible to tell us some details of the blessed life in heaven, as we heard in the Revelation 7 reading for today. We can only hope and believe in God's promises, as Paul wrote: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). The resurrected Jesus gives us a glimpse of eternity. He is the firstfruit of the resurrection and of the new life. We shall be like Him and we will see Him face to face.

The Bible describes the life of the saints in heaven more in a negative way than in a positive way; this means: The Bible says what will not be in heaven: sin, death, mourning, crying or pain... (Revelation 21:4) and everything related to this. On the other hand, the Bible assures us that we will be with God and that God himself will be with His people and will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Revelation 21:3,4). And Paul adds: “And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:17, 18).

Conclusion: A Bible Commentary says: *If a baby during his nine-month existence in its mother's womb had the capacity to think, to*

hope or not hope, it might find it difficult not only to imagine but also to accept as true what it “hears” about its future existence on earth. All the reports about light, space, stars, mountains, trees, skyscrapers, animals, and other creatures like itself might seem too good to be true. And that the process called birth, with all its attendant perils and pains, should be the gateway to this beautiful existence staggers both imagination and belief. To the fetus it does not yet appear what it shall be. Only at the time of birth does it learn how gloriously true it all is. So we Christians, who still live in the womb of time, find difficult not only to imagine but also to believe the glowing accounts in God’s Word about our future heavenly existence- the promises of eternal life, likeness to Christ, companion with angels and all saints, dwelling in mansions, etc. And that the process called death – involving undertakers, caskets, tombstones, and bodily decay – should be the gateway to this ecstatic existence staggers both imagination and belief. “And what we will be had not yet been made known.” But on the day of our death we shall be bowled over by reality beyond our wildest dreams, for the day will turn out to be the day of our birth into the heavenly life. “We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” ... How it works we don’t know. That it works we can be sure!

(Series B, pp.131, 132). When I read this, I thought about Prince George, future King of the United Kingdom: Is he aware of what his future will be? No, he is just a child, enjoying the love of his father and of his mother like all other children of his age. But once he will ascend to the throne! – And we too!

Blessed All saints Day, blessed saints of our Lord, in the assured hope of eternal life. Amen.

(Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 02 November 2014)