

Sermon Rev 7 9 17

Sermon: 23rd Sunday after Pentecost – All Saints Day

Text: Revelation 7:9-17 (vv.9, 13, 14)

Theme: How to wash our robes and make them white?

Goal: We are cleansed in the Baptism by the merit of the blood of Jesus shed on the cross

Dear Friends in the Living Christ,

Introduction: All Saints Day is a day of hope; - not a day of mourning for the departed ones, but a day to remember them with gladness in the assurance that they are among the “great multitude...standing before the throne (of God) and in front of the Lamb... wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands.” This is the hope of our faith as well, that we will be among them in the triumphant church after our departure. But for now we are here in the active church, struggling against temptations and spiritual enemies. The dust and the mud of the dirty world around us don't allow our robes to be white yet like the robes of the saints before the throne. But before they reach the holy blessedness, they had faced the same situation we are facing and even worse ones.

I – The tribulations

“These are they who have come out of the great tribulation.” It was not just a tribulation, but it was a “great tribulation”. The Christian Church was persecuted with great violence when John wrote the book of Revelation. The Christians were thrown to lions and other beasts in the Coliseum in Rome for the delight of the pagan people. Many were burned alive and also crucified. Even John in his old age (over 90 years old) was sent in exile to an isolated island. It was not easy to be a Christian in the first century. God gave this vision to the Apostle to be shared with the persecuted ones to show them what

was waiting for them after death. And they rejoiced with hope in God's promises, facing even martyrdom with their eyes fixed on the crucified and now exalted Jesus, seated at the right hand of God the Father!

This kind of tribulation is not only something from the past. In some countries, in the 21st Century, where ISIS is fighting, in North Korea and other countries, Christians are suffering terrible persecution! But reports tell us that they are facing the tribulation steadfast in the Christian faith.

We are not facing this kind of persecution in our country. The tribulations we are facing are of other order. I think we can quote here what St. Peter wrote about Lot, who lived in Sodom and Gomorra, cities that were destroyed by God due to the wickedness of their people. Peter wrote: "(God) rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)."^{2 Peter 2:7, 8}. It is not easy to be a Christian nowadays, among so many attractions and distractions of the world around us, and as many are following a way totally contrary to the Law of God. "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth" we confess at the beginning of each Service.

The situation becomes more tragic when we think that each person is born sinful and carries the original sin within him/her. Even little children, who seem to be so innocent and cute, carry the original sin and if nothing is done, they will not be among the blessed ones wearing white robes before the throne of God.

II – God washes us

But thank God that He found a solution to rescue us from this wicked

world and to assure a place among the blessed saints for each of us. Our text shows how those blessed ones arrived in heaven: “They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” This brings us to the Holy Baptism that June has just received. The water of the Baptism is not plain water, but it is a Mean of Grace through which God bestows the blessing of forgiveness and life conquered by Jesus on the cross. Due to His blood shed for our sins, we are free from the penalty of sin and we can enjoy the freedom of children of God. Prophet Isaiah wrote: “Come now, let us settle the matter,”

says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” (Isaiah 1:18). John says: “The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7). And Paul wrote to Titus: “But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying.” (Titus 3:4-8a).

The white robe is a symbol of blessedness and purity. In the past it was used to cover the baptized child with a white garment and to say: *Receive this white garment to show that you have been clothed with the robe of Christ’s righteousness that covers all your sin. So shall you stand without fear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the inheritance prepared for you from the foundation of the world.* (LSB p. 271).

We can be sure that we are among the saints of God not only in heaven but just now as His forgiven people. Through the Absolution,

through the Baptism, through the Holy Communion God forgives us and declares us His saints. Are we free from sin? Not yet; therefore we come daily before the throne of grace to receive mercy, and we kneel before the altar to receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus, given and shed for us for forgiveness of our sins. Once we will be delivered from all our sins and will wear white robes before the throne of God and before the Lamb, because we were washed in the blood of the Lamb!

Conclusion: The reality that the blessed ones are living in heaven is the accomplishment of the promises Jesus proclaimed at the Beatitudes. Jesus said in Mathew 5 about the Blessed ones: “...for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven... for they will be comforted...they will be shown mercy...they will see God... they will be called children of God...” And our text reveals the kind of life the blessed ones are experiencing: “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. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst... For the Lamb at the centre 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.”

As baptized and forgiven children of God, this is our faith and this is our hope. “Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers” as Psalm 1:1 says; “but his delight is in the Law of the Lord and on his Law meditates day and night.” For them Jesus says: “Some of you have not soiled your clothes. You will walk with me dressed in white... He who overcomes will like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.” (Revelation 3:4-5). Amen.