

All Saints Day
October 31-November 1, 2009

“Rejoicing as Saints”

Text: Matthew 5:1-12

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews writes: “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, but 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.” (Hebrews 12:1-2)

The writer is referring to those listed in the great eleventh chapter of Hebrews, the heroes of faith in the Old Testament. Today as well it is proper for us to remember their example of faith as well as God’s blessings in their lives. The saints of God are not holy because of the perfect lives they live, but because they have been made holy by their Savior Jesus Christ. You, along with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob may rightly be called a saint of God. You are so because of what God’s perfect Son has accomplished for you.

Historically the church has celebrated this day since the third century A.D. Later it was set as May 13 in the year 610 as the celebration of St. Mary and all Martyrs. Later in the year 835 it was moved to November 1 for the sake of convenience as we know it today. While we do not pray to the saints of old, it is proper for us to remember their example and the blessings they received from God. As we do that we know that future blessings await us in this life and also in heaven and imitate the faith of those who have gone before us as we are-

REJOICING AS SAINTS

- I. With a common faith in Jesus Christ alone**
- II. With common experiences with those who have gone before us**

I.

A. In the concluding verses of Hebrews 11, the writer summarizes: “And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God has provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.” (Hebrews 11:39-40) There is a common faith that we share with the Old Testament saints as well as the saints of our memories that trusts in Jesus Christ. They awaited his coming and in the New Testament era we know that he has come and will return again.

In closing the Beatitudes, Jesus makes a connection to those who heard him that day with the Old Testament prophets. Suffering and persecution followed them as well as it would the disciples and others as well as us today. Jesus says: “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Certainly this would be the truth in the lives of the twelve. History and tradition records that only John lived to an old age and died of natural causes. All the rest died the death of martyrs as they boldly defended their faith.

Years ago, there was a man in Chicago by the name of Frank Loesch. He was a Christian layman who was somewhat of a living legend. He along with others formed the Chicago Crime Commission. The purpose of the commission was to take the notorious Al Capone to court and have him put away. Loesch did this without any government help, but only his faith and the help of other interested citizens of the city.

While the Commission met, Loesch, his family and friends were under constant threats for their lives. Ultimately the case against Capone was won and he went to jail. He had risked his life for to live out his faith, which was also what the saints of old did as Scripture points out and as Jesus promises in our text.

B. Our lives as God's children are more than living for the present, but also looking toward the future as well. We are those who are in spiritual need and need the redeeming work of our Savior. We mourn over our sins, but also have the comfort of the redeeming work of our Savior. Martin Luther said: "We have the clear assurance that God does not cast aside sinners, that is, those who recognize their sin and desire to come to their senses, who thirst for righteousness." We share this with those who have gone before us and on this day remember their example that encourages and strengthens us in our faith today.

II.

A. Jesus says: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Earlier Jesus had talked about those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. This is the righteousness that god alone can give to us which is ours in Jesus Christ. Later on in this Gospel, Jesus told the disciples that they would indeed be persecuted but "But the one who endures to the end will be saved." (Matthew 10:22) He also reminded them that if he was persecuted they would be as well because they were bringing his message to the world. You and I can be sure of the same thing today.

During our lifetime we may not be imprisoned, yet certainly Christians throughout the world are. It is really all about what we consider important in our lives. As the world looks at us it does not understand nor does it want

understand. It has always been that way because the world is occupied with the present. We in turn have a great present and an even greater future in store because of what Jesus Christ has accomplished for us.

B. The Beatitudes have long been a discussion of many trying to interpret what they mean. I have shared with some of you the comment of the lady in the hospital in Moline years ago. I was visiting one of our members and had shared some Scripture with her. The lady in the bed next to her told me that her favorite Scripture was the Beatitudes. It was that way because it made her want to “go out and do all those things.”

The world, even the Christian world has often seen these as a new version of the Ten Commandments. These certainly are wonderful virtues when they are made very literal, but there is so much more. Remember, this is the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. In this sermon Jesus took his hearers to a much deeper level of faith.

As we hear these great sayings of Jesus once again, we realize the greatness of a life in connection with him. If you will, these statements are a prism of what we confess in our faith and what it means to be in Christ. Jesus has brought the greatest comfort and peace to us by his life given for us. We can be assured that one day we will see God and inherit the earth as Jesus promises. This will be the joy of the resurrection that Jesus has accomplished for us.

We have setbacks, suffering and trials in this life, but anticipate the life to come that Jesus has made certain for us by his life, death, and resurrection. The saints of old also experienced these sometimes in greater ways than we do today. What is common is the faith we share in Jesus Christ and the lace we will enjoy in the great reunion is heaven. As the hymn says: “We feebly struggle they in glory shine; Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine.” (LSB 677 v. 4) Amen.