

All Saints Day, 2009

Lessons: Rev. 7: 9-17, 1 John 3: 1-3, Matthew 5: 1-12

Intro. This weekend we are given the privilege of celebrating the church festival of 'All Saints Day'. Which doesn't always fall on a weekend and so can be overlooked or unobserved most years. BUT, not this year, we get to sing all these beautiful hymns and hear the Scripture lessons of 'All Saints Day', Nov.

1. The celebration of 'All Saints Day' was the impetuous for Martin Luther to nail his 95 Thesis about repentance and forgiveness to the Castle Church doors of Wittenberg, Germany igniting the Lutheran Reformation of the Christian Church, on Oct. 31, 1517, Halloween or Hallowed Eve/Holy Evening before 'All Saints Day'. Luther knew people would be coming to the Castle Church on 'All Saints Day' to venerate the 1,000s of relics of the saints which Frederick III, the Elector of Saxony had piously collected over the years; such as the finger bone of John the Baptist, a vial of breast milk of the Virgin Mary, etc. Luther being a young theology professor/priest at Wittenberg U. wanted to debate/discuss indulgence buying and selling, relic veneration and saint petitioning in the light of God's Word. So he posted his 95 Thesis on the Hallowed Eve of 'All Saints Day'. Thus sparked the firestorm of the Lutheran Reformation which is still burning today in the blazing light of God's Word in this dark, dark world. But, who really are 'All' these 'Saints'? And what is a saint anyway? And that is what I want to talk to you about a little bit on this All Saints weekend.

THE ONE TRUE SAINT, THE HOLY ONE OF GOD = JESUS, WHO MAKES US ALL THE SAINTS, THE HOLY ONES OF GOD!

I. Most of the time when someone thinks of a saint they think of someone who has been canonized by the Pope in Rome, who teaches that saints are someone who has lived such a good life that they have earned or merited from God a superabundance of God's grace and favor. So much so, that these saints can transfer some of their grace and favor onto you when their relics are venerated or they are petitioned by your prayers.

There are some pretty strict requirements for a person to be canonized as a saint by the Pope. First, the person has to be dead for at least 5 years. I think that counts most of us out. Then after the person has been dead for the required time an investigation is made by a bishop to see just how virtuous the hoped-

to-be saint really was. If the investigation turns out to be favorable the bishop then turns it over to the authorities in Rome and select theologians and cardinals continue the investigation into the virtues and merits of the proposed saint. Finally, there must be at least one documented and verifiable miracle performed by the dead saint-to-be. And if that wasn't enough in order to qualify to be a saint, a documented and verifiable miracle must also be done by the saint-to-be after they have died. Holy Cow! It's pretty darn difficult to qualify to be one of 'All' those 'Saints' with all those requirements. You can be pretty confident I'll never be canonized by the Pope in Rome. In order to be one of 'All' those 'Saints' you have to really, really work and merit the Pope's approval even after you're dead. Only then will the Pope canonize you so other more unsaintly people like me can pray and plead to share some of your superabundant grace and favor in order to be blessed in God's sight. Is that what we are celebrating on ALL SAINTS DAY, a canonized, superabundant merited person whom we can venerate and pray to for their merits in the sight of God?

II. NO! NO! In reality there is only 'ONE' who has actually earned or merited the grace and favor of God to whom we are to pray and plead 'through faith'. There is really only 'ONE' who has earned the right to the title of God's saint, a saint literally meaning a 'HOLY ONE', a sanctified one. And that 'ONE' is Jesus Christ.

1 Timothy 2 'God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth ... is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all people'. Jesus, is the ONE and only true saint and mediator before God and it is Jesus whom we celebrate on ALL SAINTS DAY and everyday.

Today in our Gospel lesson, Matthew 5, we heard what is called the Beatitudes or Blessings of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Many want to teach these beatitudes or blessings as rules or ordinances to live your life by, some even say if you try hard enough you can actually live up to these Beatitudes. Well, understood that way, these Beatitudes of Jesus aren't much of a blessing, but they become a curse. Because even as the 3rd Use of the Law = a guide to our lives, these Beatitudes of Jesus as God's Law will always show us our sins, our failures.

Instead of Law, however, I propose the Beatitudes of Jesus are truly a blessing and not a curse because they are describing first and foremost that 'ONE' true saint of God = Jesus Christ Himself, our Mediator, our Substitute, our Savior.

‘Blessed are those who mourn’, and who has truly mourned but Jesus God incarnate? **Isaiah 53 ‘He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief’.**

‘Blessed are the meek’, and who is truly meek but Jesus God in flesh and blood? **Zechariah 9 ‘See, your King comes to you, having salvation, meek and riding on a donkey’.**

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst = that is crave, for righteousness’, and who but Jesus, God’s grace in body and soul, truly craves our righteousness? **1 Corinthians 1 ‘Christ is our wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption’.**

‘Blessed are the merciful’, and who but Jesus, God Almighty, is truly merciful to us sinners? **Hebrews 2 ‘He had to be made like His brothers = like us in every way, so that He might become ... merciful’.**
‘Blessed are the pure in heart’ and who but Jesus, the Son of God, is truly pure? **2 Corinthians 5 ‘God made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God’**

‘Blessed are the peacemakers’, and who but Jesus, the Son of man, has truly made peace? **John 14 ‘Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you’, Ephesians 2 ‘He Himself is our peace ... through the cross’**

‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake’, and who but Jesus, true God and true man, has endured persecution? As God Himself incarnate, Jesus was spit upon, mocked, ridiculed, wiped, jeered, crucified on an instrument of torture = the cross, as a common criminal, as the target of the world’s hatred in order to be our Substitute, to be our Savior, to be our Mediator.

The ONE and ONLY Saint, is the Holy One of God, Jesus Christ! And by His imputed righteousness, by His vicarious holiness, all those who have been incorporated into Jesus by the means of His grace, His Holy Word – the Holy Bible, by His Holy Baptism in His holy name, by His Holy Communion for the forgiveness of sins, purifying of sins, by His Holy Spirit, into His Holy Christian Church, as the communion of saints. We are the blessed ones of God, we are **‘ALL THE SAINTS’** of God by Jesus’ merits, by Jesus’ works, by Jesus’ grace. Jesus’ saintliness, Jesus’ holiness is proven by what He has vicariously done for us, and yes, Jesus even has done miracles after He died. And you’re one of them = a

sinner declared to be holy, declared to be a saint in the sight of God, all and completely and entirely and fully for Jesus sake! That is what we celebrate ALL SAINTS DAY and everyday!

Conclusion: In our first reading for today, **Revelation 7**, we have God's canonization of His saints and it doesn't need the approval of the Pope in Rome. Note how the people are described.

First of all there are lots of them '**a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages**', not just those who went through the Pope's approval. Secondly, we're told '**these are those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb**', it's not by their merits and worthiness, it's the merit and worthiness of the blood of Jesus! Thirdly, notice what their witness is, they cry out, they shout '**Salvation belongs to our God ... and to the Lamb**', it is not their merits, it's not their worthiness.

This my people is a picture of not only heaven where are loved ones wait for us as the saints of God, but this is a picture of you right now. Already by God's grace and merit you a sinner have been declared to be God's saints, not by your merits or works, but by Jesus', the Lamb. You may not feel much like a saint by the world's or the Pope's standards, but in God's eyes for Jesus sake you are '**ALL THE SAINTS**', you are **THE HOLY ONES OF GOD**, now and forever.

1 John 3 'See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called the children of God; and so we are ... everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure'. Amen