

Dear fellow baptized saints of God; grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the name Christ Jesus our Lord and Saviour. The title for today's sermon is "Behold, the Lamb" and is based on all three of our reading. Let us pray...Amen.

Today we celebrate the Feast of All Saints', All Hallows' Day, or better known as All Saints' Day.

"This Feast of All Saints' is the most comprehensive of the days of celebration and remembrance, because it encompasses the entire scope of that great cloud of witnesses with which Hebrews chapter 12 reminds us we are surrounded by (Hebrews 12:1). It holds before the eyes of faith that great multitude which no man can number: all saints of God in Christ-from every nation, race, culture, and language-who have come "out of the great tribulation. . . who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"(Revelation 7:9, 14). As such, this feast day sets before us the full breadth and length of our dear Lord's gracious salvation as recorded in Ephesians 3 (Ephesians 3:17-19).

The feast of All Saints shares with Easter a celebration of the resurrection, since all those who have died with Christ Jesus in their Baptism have also been raised with Him in His resurrection (Romans 6:3-8). The feast of All Saints shares with Pentecost a celebration of the ingathering of the entire Church catholic-in heaven and on earth, in all times and places-in the one body of Christ, in the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Just as we have all been called to the one hope that belongs to our call, "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and in all" (Ephesians 4:4-6). And the Feast of All Saints also shares with the final Sundays of the Church Year an eschatological focus on the life everlasting and a confession that "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18). In all of these, the emphasis is, the purpose of this feast is to fix our eyes upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, that we might not grow weary or fainthearted (Hebrews 12:2-3)." (Wording adapted from *Treasury of Daily Prayer*, CPH, All Saints' Day, 1 November)

And so All Saints Day goes wrong when one sees the great crowd and starts analyzing and poking at them, focusing on them, instead of focusing on what they are focused on. For when you look at the crowd the one thing that surely strikes you is that they are all staring in the same direction, gazing upon the same object, with the same look of astonishment and awe and love upon their faces.

Otherwise they are very different — some were among the rich and most among the poor, some black and some white, some red and some yellow, some struggled with this sin and some with that sin. They are a very diverse crowd in so many ways.

But the thing that holds them together as ONE crowd is the object on which they are fixed and the love and awe that shine from them as they rejoice to look upon what they look upon.

So, as a Christian, one is not called to analyze that look and imitate it outwardly so that one can sort of "fit into the crowd." That's to be what Dr. Luther calls "a paper saint." Instead,

we are directed to push this way and that to get in and get a glimpse of what it is that they are all so intently looking at! Because if you do that, then you too — no matter what the unique struggles and burdens of your life — will come to wear the same look of astonishment and awe and love on your face. Not because you're trying to be like the crowd, but because you also see what the crowd has seen — and you'll drop to your knees too, and awe and love will shine from your face as well.

So in the first reading we meet this great crowd. A multitude so great that no one could fix a number on it — from all the nations, tribes, peoples and tongues of the earth — clothed in white and carrying high the palm branch of victory in their hands, shouting, proclaiming and saying. But what is that they are focused on? Not on themselves! Where are they staring? Not at each other! They are all facing the throne of God and of the Lamb. And they sing aloud: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb!"

Do you see the look of awe and wonder on their faces? They are now seeing Him, Christ Jesus, the Lamb of God, with the eyes of the body whom they had heard before with their ears. He is their Joy and their Delight. They sing with the Psalmist: "Whom have I in heaven but You. And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (Psalm 73:25-26)

And what a portion He is! "They are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits upon the throne shelters them with His presence. Nothing in all creation can harm them! For the Lamb in the midst of the throne is their Shepherd, and He guides them to springs of living water, and God Himself wipes away every tear from their eyes." A huge portion, indeed!

And so they stare into the face of Him who is the Gift of all of this and more, the One they call the Lamb, the One we call Jesus — a gift beyond all meriting or deserving. A gift that is all the more astonishing because of how it was given. For when the Father saw our desperate situation, He did not only send us prophets with words of judgment and hope, He not only gave a Law to show us our great need, but finally at the last, He sent to us His beloved and only Son. He sent Him into our flesh and was born of the Virgin Mary. He came among us not only to pay the debt of honor we all owed to the Father and could not pay, but He came to do far more! He came to release us from the prison of our sin and death. He came to clothe us with His own righteousness, to bring us into His Father's house and make us co-heirs with Him of His glory. He came to summon us to the feast, that we might sit down beside Him at the Father's table and enjoy a life — a feast — that no death will ever destroy and no sin can ever take away.

But it is when the saints look at him and see HOW Jesus did all this that their love and joy overflow. "Rich wounds yet visible above in beauty glorified." They see on His body — the marks left by all our sore abuse of Him. They see where the nails were driven, where the spear ran through, where the whip scarred his sacred back. All of which was our telling Him: Get out of our world and leave us alone! We don't need you! To which He responded, "I love you and I forgive you and there is nothing you will ever be able to do that will make me hate you. I blot out your sin. I destroy your enemy the devil, I abolish your death!"

And seeing Christ they are changed, transfigured. Our epistle today said: "Beloved, now we are the children of God and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope purifies himself, just as He is pure." Merely having that hope, being baptized into it, already changes a person, but when that hope is realized, when you stare into the face of Him who loved you to the Cross and Resurrection, and has at last brought you home, you will be "like Him." Seeing Him will change everything.

And so the crowd stares at this Lamb! Sings to this Lamb! Falls down before this Lamb, this Lord Jesus! That's why, after the Words of Institution, we sing the Agnus Dei, the Lamb of God. For after the Word of Jesus has been spoken over the bread, that Bread is the Body of the Lamb; and after the Word of Jesus has been spoken over the cup, that cup is the Blood of the Lamb. The Holy Liturgy offers a teasing taste of this as we are summoned to join their endless praises and doxologies ... with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.

And make no mistake about it: this is what makes a saint, to be part of this crowd, that from the heart one sees Jesus as this Lamb, the One given for us, and so forever in love worships and praises Him! To ache for the day when we will see Him whom we have loved without seeing.

On the mountain Jesus sat and around Him gathered His disciples. And He spoke blessing on them as they looked into His face. But they would fully understand those blessings only when they came to know that the One blessing them was none other than their Lamb, the Lamb given them by the Father's love. Blessings that would reach their ultimate fruition when they stand before Him with the whole crowd on that glorious day and experience the unspeakable comfort of a nail-scared hand, gently touching each face, wiping away every tear. Blessed indeed are all who in that crowd! Blessed indeed are you fellow baptized saints of God in Christ. Blessed are all who see and praise the Lamb! All saints! Amen.

*\* This sermon based in large part on the 2013 All Saints' Day sermon by Rev. Will Weedon, LCMS director of Worship and International Center Chaplain, and from the Treasury of Daily Prayer, CPH, All Saints' Day, 1 November.*