

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus, our Saviour and Lord, be yours this day. The title for today's sermon is "What Kind of Love...?" and is based on today's Epistle lesson: First John chapter 3. Let us pray...Amen.

Yesterday was the Feast of All Saints. All Saints' Day is a time to remember the tremendous love God has for His fallen creation. On All Saints' Day we remember all the saints, all our Christian brothers and sisters who have preceded us in the One Holy and Apostolic Church here on earth, though brought in By God's incredible grace, and are now the saints who are waiting for us in heaven. With those same saints we patiently wait for Christ's return and the glorious Resurrection of the dead when we will be like Him. With all the saints, we worship the incarnate Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world, the same Lamb of God whom the saints in heaven adore, and the same incarnate Lamb of God who continues to come to teach us with His Word and feed us with His very own Body and Blood to forgive our sins and to join Himself to us, and to all the saints in eternity.

And so, preaching God's saving Word on All Saints' Day is always proclaiming it to the saints on earth: you and me. This is not only the simple reality, but also the biblical model of the life of the saints here on earth. But this day also connects us with the saints in heaven, pictured so vividly in the First Reading from the Book of Revelation. Appropriately, it is also John who, in today's Epistle, makes the connection between the two: "children of God" is what we "are" (1 Jn 3:1) now and what we will become at Christ's return. In the mean time, the saints on earth wait here amid the troubles of this sin filled life, while the saints in heaven wait in the glorious presence of the Lamb.

But, do you envy the saints who've gone before us, the ones who are gloriously with the angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, the ones in the presence of God Himself in His full glory and majesty? In the amazing vision of St. John, in our First Reading, believers from every nation, clothed in white robes washed in the blood of the Lamb, are crying out, "**Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!**" (*Revelation 7:14*) These are the saints who feebly struggle no more; they hunger and thirst no more. They have no more tears; they have no more pain; they have no more sin. They will never again experience death. We, on the other hand, long and desire to be with these saints in heaven. We consider them so blessed, so fortunate, so joyous, so righteous and pure, so forgiven and cleansed, so satisfied and so crowned with the gift of eternal life!

But even you, you are a baptized child of God in Christ Jesus. Right now, as you struggle in this life on earth, dear brothers and sisters, Christ says, "**Blessed are you!**" You are already blessed because of God's wonderful love and gifts poured out on you. You have those same gifts the saints in heaven are rejoicing in, though not fully visible yet through your sinful flesh.

The reason you have those same gifts is because of God's tremendous love for you through Jesus Christ, His Son. **"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the full and complete payment for our sins."**(1 John 4:9-10) In today's Epistle reading, John proclaims God's love for you and all who believe. He tells both the quality and the quantity of God's love for you and all sinners. Despite all your iniquity, your selfishness, and your sinfulness, God has called you to be His own beloved child through the waters of Baptism.

Just stop and ponder for minute; sometimes we take Christ's sacrifice for us for granted and forget where we stood before God called us and made us His own children. Before God called us, You and I stood eternally condemned from the moment of our conception(*Psalm 51:5*) since there we inherited the substance and guilt of Original Sin along with its full condemnation. From that moment we were sinful and thereby continued to eternally condemn ourselves by our choices, actions, words, and thoughts. You and I, from the moment of our conception were conceived as actual children of Satan, self-condemned, and full enemies of the Lord God Almighty. We deserved absolutely nothing good from God. We deserved His full wrath and His righteous judgement against our every sin. We did not fear God. We did not love, or even mildly like God. We did not trust God, nor could we since, since as Scripture says, we were enemies of God and dead in our sin. We had only one word to say before God's Judgement Seat: 'guilty'; Guilty on all charges; Guilty on all accounts. We were dead guilty for all our actions, thoughts, words, and decisions because, everything done apart from faith and trust in God is damnable sin. Before God's righteous Judgement you and I stood dead.

(Pause)And that is why today's Epistle reading is so refreshing, why it is so comforting. John reminds us in his letter, and points us to our only hope: **"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."**(1 John 3:1a)

John proclaims whose you are—you are the children of God. Christ Jesus Himself made you such through the waters of holy Baptism. There at the font, by water and the Word, you were taken from being a child of the devil, drown, died, and you were reborn a child of God. This is no metaphor! You were physically and spiritually taken from the claws of Satan by Christ powerful working through His death and resurrection. By Jesus' own sacrifice, death, and resurrection, He delivered you into Himself and the company of saints. Paul describes what happened in his letter to the Galatians when he said: **"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."**(Galatians 2:20) and as Peter says in his epistle: **"Baptism now saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."**(1 Peter 3:21)

Christ's death and resurrection is not a metaphor! Neither was yours in your Baptism. If it were only a metaphor, so would be the forgiveness, deliverance, and eternal life Christ promises in His Word. God recreated you in Christ through the waters of Baptism. Paul told the Corinthians how "**if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.**" (2 Corinthians 5:17). As a baptized believer you are a new creation. You are not just named children of God, you are actually reborn as His child, and are actually Fathered by God. This is why we can call Him Father in the Lord's Prayer, and why He invites us to pray to Him. In this new relationship, God pours out His love and blessings on you, not as you deserved, nor as you have earned. Instead God lovingly pours them out on you by His grace and because of His undying love for you. You were a dying sinner before God called you His child in Baptism and there gave you life. When Christ returns in glory, He will reveal the eternal life He has given you now.

Despite the lies, the partial truths, and the deceptions of this world, God never lies, and He never fails to keep His promises. We have something more certain than anything this world can offer. As Paul writes, "**The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,**"¹⁷ **and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.**" (Rom 8:16-17)

You are God's own child. Does that mean everything will go perfectly for you in this life? No, instead it means a life under the cross of Christ. It means you share in Christ's blessings and in Christ's sufferings as long as you live in this flesh. Yet, in death and at the resurrection, there will be no more suffering, no more pain, no tears, no illness, no sin, no death. In death you were numbered with those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. This is a paradox. White is the colour of purity and you are purified by Christ's blood shed on the cross and in your place. White is the colour imputed to you and demonstrates Christ's righteousness in your place. This gift of righteousness is given in Baptism when you were washed in the blood of the Lamb and into His name. In those baptismal waters, God joins you together with all the saints who went before you, and are the saints still to come, in the holy Christian and Apostolic Church. God binds you together by His Word and His Sacraments. Here God plants, grows and strengthens your faith and trust in Christ and His completed work of salvation for you. And now, as Paul says, "**that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,**"²⁶ **for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.**²⁷ **For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.**" (Galatians 3:25-27)

You are numbered with the saints. Together we worship and bow down to the Lamb. Together with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven we join in the feast of the Lamb: the Lord's Supper. Until Christ returns, this is the closest we get to heaven and all the saints who are with God. In the Divine Service heaven meets earth. The Incarnate Son of God, "**the bread of life from heaven**" (John 6:35,41) comes down to us with His very own body and

blood for us to eat and drink. As Jesus said **"For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."**(*John 6:33*) Jesus tells us, **"I am the bread of life."**(*John 6:35*) He continues saying, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."**(*John 6:53-58*)

Here Christ joins Himself and His eternal life to you and binds you to Himself and all the saints. Here we see, and taste, the love the Father has given us. Here heaven and earth meet—the saint on earth worshipping with the saints in heaven—together in the presence of the Lamb.

Yesterday was the Feast of All Saints. Therefore, today we remember our loved ones who have died in the Lord. They are no longer here with us in the great tribulation of this sin filled world. They wait with the Lord. They wait for the day when the Lord returns and makes all things new ... the day when the Lord raises them in both body and soul. If the Lord is slow by our standards, we shall join them and wait at the Lord's side. If the Lord returns soon, we shall not join them in death, but put on immortality even as our loved ones rise from the dead. Then we shall see the fulfillment of the love the Father has given to us, His own children, as we gather together on the new earth and live with them forever in the presence of the Lord. Amen.

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