

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation today is the Epistle Lesson of the First Epistle of Saint John, chapter one verses one through three.

Boys and Girls, I pray that you are doing well today. Today, we as a church celebrate All Saints Day. Do you know what a Saint is? A saint is usually thought of as someone who has died whom God used to bless His Church on Earth. We have come together today to remember before God those who have gone before us into eternal life. The ones who've gone to heaven in the past year are listed in the bulletin. We just thanked God for their faith and life among us. We praise God that in Jesus they have already been given their place before his throne.

What can we say of those who have gone before us? And what does the Word of God say this day of us, those who still remain here? Because this is hard for many of us, we need to hear the Word of God together for comfort and for direction. Ponder those question as you hear the rest of the sermon. You may go back to your seats and those who love you.

THE SAINTS ALL LOOK TO JESUS.

I. What can we say of those who have gone before us?

If we were able to see those who have gone before, we would see them all looking in one direction together. They are looking at Jesus. They now see him as he is. So they cannot take their eyes off him. No longer do they see through a mirror dimly, but now they see face-to-face (1 Cor 13:12).

As Saint John writes, "Beloved, we are God's children, and so we are!" The saints who have gone before us are children of God who are now home with the Father. They are basking forever in the warmth of the Father's astonishingly great love for them and for us. How do we become God's children? It is nothing that we have done. It is not because we have this or that blood coursing through our veins. It is all because of the love of God that gave His Son, Jesus, who's blood left his veins on the cross into death for us. Jesus bore our sins. He defeated Death and the Devil on our behalf. Everything that would separate us from the Father was given to Jesus to bear for us, in our place. He dies and rises from the dead for us.

They are there, these saints we remember, not of their own accord. In fact, they are astonished at the grace of God to give his Son for us. They know they are there before the Lord solely because they are washed clean in the blood of Jesus. When John is granted his vision of heaven and of those around the throne "clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands" (Rev 7:9), he is asked, "Who are these, . . . and from where have they come?" (v 13). The angel answers his own question: "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (v 14). This Lamb is "their shepherd, [who] will guide them to springs of living water, and

God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (7:17). Here we see that God will wipe away our tears as well and give us comfort found in His Son’s resurrection from the dead.

What else can we say of them? They are blessed. Every one of Jesus’ Beatitudes (today’s Gospel) is fulfilled for them. “Theirs is the kingdom.” They are comforted; they are satisfied; they see God; they are called sons of God. They are pure in heart and rejoice in their reward (Mt 5:2–12).

The world may not know them or remember them much (1 Jn 3:1), but the Lord remembers them and acknowledges them forever.

You all know of many people who served the Lord quietly, with no fanfare here, but now are home there in eternal life. Bill Wegner, Vic Schueffle, and many more that serve the Lord faithfully yet quietly rejoicing in their reward in heaven.

It is as we sang before: “Despised and scorned, they sojourned here; But now, how glorious they appear! Those martyrs stand, A priestly band, God’s throne forever near. On earth they wept through bitter years; Now God has wiped away their tears, Transformed their strife To heav’nly life, And freed them from their fears” (*LSB* 676:2).

Do you see the wonderful things we can say in Jesus of those who have gone before us in the faith, and what great promises God has fulfilled for them? And the best news is that these promises are not only for those who’ve gone before! The promises are also for us.

II. What can we say about us?

We said the saints are all looking in one direction, all looking at Jesus. We do not yet see him as he is, for we are still here. But we do hear him in his Word. We are washed by him in Baptism. We feed on him in his body and blood. Now he calls us to follow him. And we do not do so alone! Remembering that “we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,” all the saints who have gone before us, we “run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who 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” (Heb 12:1–2). His Word gives us the vision of all those saints around the throne saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Rev 7:10), and we remember that all of this begins even now in our worship here as we join with Angels, Archangels and all the Host of Heaven.

This Lamb, our Savior Jesus, has made us children of the Father, as John calls us to “see what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (v 1). Hear the sense of wonder and astonishment in those words, that we poor miserable, stained with sin sinners, in Jesus, call God our Father. That he invites us to pray as dear children, “Our

Father.” How great is our God’s love for us. That He takes us, washes us in the blood of His Son, and makes us His own!

Like the saints before us, we know we live and love only by grace. Every day we come before the Lord, confessing our many sins and doubts and failures. We take comfort together in the promise, “Everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (v 3). None but the pure can see the infinitely Pure One. In all these passages the *Greek* is the same verb *opsomai*; not denoting the action of seeing, but the state of him to whose eye or mind the object is presented; hence the *Greek* verb is always in the middle or reflexive voice, to *perceive* and *inwardly appreciate*.

How are we made pure? How can we see the infinitely Pure One? This happens in Jesus by his blood and by his death for us. He washes us clean, as John also proclaimed, in “the blood of Jesus his Son [which] cleanses us from all sin” (1 Jn 1:7). There is a manner in which these words may seem strange to our ears. Doesn’t blood actually stain our hands and our clothes, not wash them? How can blood cleanse rather than stain? Well, of course, it’s the blood of Jesus, but think of the purpose of blood in our bodies. If you tie off part of your body with a tourniquet, you will soon feel that part of your body tingling, because the blood is pooling there, and the poisons are beginning to build up. When the flow is restored to that part of the body, the tingling goes away as the poisons are washed away! If you have ever seen someone receive a transfusion, you can see life returning again. With each ounce of blood, you could see the life returning to the body. This is what happens spiritually when the blood of Jesus cleanses us from the poison of sin. The blood of Jesus is there in our Baptism to wash us clean, inwardly and outwardly. The blood of Jesus is poured out for us in the Lord’s Supper to restore our life, forgiving our sins, strengthening us in our faith. Now God looks at us in Jesus, forgiven, washed, covered, made alive with his life, wearing the white robe of his perfect righteousness covering all our sin and death.

What else can we say? Because we are now wearing Christ’s holiness, we have everlasting life in us already. We don’t know as yet exactly how our heavenly bodies will differ from our earthly bodies. But we can get a pretty good idea that it will be wonderful, because we will be like Jesus. Imagine that—he loves us so much that he kept his body even after the resurrection and ascension, just so that he could remain our human brother forever! Paul says in Philippians 3:21 that by the power that enables Jesus to bring everything under his control, he will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. Wow! Is this worth waiting for or what? If these are the promises waiting for us, why would we go off looking for something better? What new revelations, new insights, or new knowledge could the gnostic cults or the world offer that is better than that? What more is there to say? The saints in heaven live forever before the

Lord. They see him face-to-face, for they are with him always. Take comfort, O people of God, take comfort in these promises, as you remember your loved ones who have gone before. Find your blessing in Jesus, who has washed us clean and “freed us from our sins by his blood” (Rev 1:5). Know that you are his own dear child forever, and that he calls us to love one another. And when we are discouraged by the fight against sin, death, and devil, we can remember again what we sang today: “And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long, Steals on the ear the distant triumph song, And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong. Alleluia! Alleluia! The golden evening brightens in the west; Soon, soon to faithful warriors cometh rest; Sweet is the calm of paradise the blest. Alleluia! Alleluia!” (*LSB* 677:5–6).

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.