

ALL SAINTS' SUNDAY
November 2, a.D. 2008
Revelation 7: (2 – 8) 9:17

On this All Saints' Sunday, we remember the saints among us who fell asleep in Christ since the last time we celebrated All Saints' Sunday. We name them by name before the Lord and His throne of grace. Bertha Loyska and Margaret Baier are the names of our blessed dead. For some of us, we may know very little of the name we name and then on the other hand, there may be a name of a life that was intertwined with ours, a name we know intimately, loved and dearly missed.

As we remember these saints, we are drawn back to their memory, remembering a kind word spoken, the tone of their voice, the touch of a warm embrace and everything they meant to us. But as time moves on and the timely distance between the living and the dead threatens to swallow our memories of them, we fight against forgetting them, vowing to remember them, their sound, their touch and smell.

The greater we loved them and they loved us, the more we miss them. Grieving is good, but grieving without hope is not good; for to be stuck in hopeless grief would chain us to the past without hope for the future. If we only rely on our memory of them for comfort then that would only last as long as our minds are strong and our memories vivid. If we only remember the good things about them, as our memories naturally do, then we forget the truth that they were not perfect in this life and we lose the magnitude of sin before a holy God.

The God of the saints in heaven is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is God of the living not the dead and his words are living words, they are our life and the very thing we need in the middle of grief for His words give us hope, comfort and a very picture of the saints who stand before him and wait until the Last Day of the glorious return of Christ.

The words of the living God are stronger than our memories for they flow from Him to us and point us forward, while giving thanks for all the blessed dead meant to us, they give us a true picture of heaven.

St. John was taken by the Holy Spirit into heaven and there he saw a large multitude of saints from every nation and language standing before the throne and the

Lamb of God, wearing white robes with palm branches in their hands, crying out with loud voices endless praise to the living God: Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb! And this choir is joined by the angels, the four living creatures and 24 elders chime in and agree: Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honour and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen

What a picture! What a sight! God sitting on his throne and His victorious Lamb in the middle surrounded by a great multitude of saints and angelic beings. The picture reminds us that what we experienced in burying those who believe in the Lamb is what happens in many other places. God calls his children out of every nation, tribe, people and language. The joy of Pentecost is realized as the gospel goes forth into every culture and tongue giving hope and forgiveness to many.

What are these saints doing? We see them standing before the throne of God and the Lamb of God, wearing white robes, their eyes seeing God and their voices joining with the angels in endless praise to the God of their salvation, their hands holding palm branches.

Together they have left something behind. The constant cares and needs of the body are no more. No more hungering, thirsting and crying. They have come out of the great tribulation. Wars, famine, pestilence and persecution are no more. They experienced what God's word says: We must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God. The living God wipes every tear away.

Together His saints have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and experience the blessing of his sacrifice. Nothing else cleanses as the blood of Christ able to wipe away every sin and its memory, every stain of guilt gone. This is the common ground upon which the saints in heaven stand before the Lamb.

Together their mouths are filled with God's praise. No worries about whether to sing soprano, alto tenor or bass or if they ever sang in choir before. God's praise is spontaneous, every fear of singing gone, voices blended with the angelic perfect praise of God.

Together they hold palm branches in their hands, holding them in remembrance of the Lamb's victory and taking us back to his glorious entry into Jerusalem on Palm

Sunday where child and adults praised the Christ: Hosanna, in the highest! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

This is what the saints are doing in heaven right now. The word of God gives us a clear and glorious picture of heaven. The same word of God gives us hope, comfort and encouragement to go on without the blessed dead but also the same forgiveness which the saints in heaven have experienced and together with them the same praise of God in our mouths.

That helps us in our loneliness and grief. We are not alone. Christ is risen. He lives. He prays for us. He joins our lips with the saints in heaven in one glorious song. He bids us come into his presence before his holy altar, has given us the white robe of his holiness to wear, has named us with his name in holy baptism, and unites us with his blessed saints in heaven. For there is one Lord of heaven and earth who comes to us now in our time of great tribulation and gives us hope, his forgiveness, his comfort and timeless presence.

We are free to mourn our dead. Grieving is indeed good but God in his kindness opens our ears to hear his words: Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted. The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the Law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the very Paschal Lamb who was slain for you, who lives and prays and yearns for his flock to be one and to be comforted. Amen