

“What We Are... What We Will Be”

1 John 3:1-3

The Festival of All Saints

November 4, 2018

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our meditation will consider all of today’s appointed readings, but hear these words again from 1 John: “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Last week, the assigned readings reminded us that the Christian faith is all about Jesus. This morning’s readings remind us that, in a sense, it’s all about us. I don’t say that in a self-centered, narcissistic way, but to say that – as much as we utterly and completely depend on Jesus for forgiveness, life and salvation... just as utterly and completely does he focus his efforts on bringing that benefit to *us*. Indeed, Christ did not become man, humble himself to the point of the cross, sacrifice all, and shed his blood for a nameless, faceless people, but for His Church – “for you,” He says – “for *us*,” we can say, and we can confidently and openly rejoice this day that the Church on earth shares the inheritance of the Church in heaven.

As our epistle reading says, “See what kind of love the Father has given to *us*, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.” Or, as we’ve recently meditated upon in the book of Hebrews, “we share in Christ” – yes, the Church on earth shares the

inheritance of the Church in heaven – we share in Christ, His righteousness, His suffering, His merit, His atoning sacrifice, His victory – “*if* (that letter to the Hebrews says), *if* we hold fast our confession without wavering.”

And, that – the holding fast our confession – that’s actually the Law of God for us this All Saints Day, isn’t it? The word of God’s Law to us this day is to continue to endure and not lose hope.

Sometimes, God’s Law **curbs** our sins and stops us from disobeying God and harming others; at other times, it pricks us in the heart as it **shows** us our sins and our need for a Savior. But, those curbing and revealing functions are aimed at *all* sinners in Church and world alike. But unique to the Church, unique to the faithful, unique to those who share in Christ, is the appealing, guiding call of God’s Law to hold fast our confession, to not waver in the face of adversity. That can’t be said to those who don’t believe the Gospel – how can they hold fast to and not waver from that which they never believed? This encouraging exhortation of God’s Law is uniquely for you who believe the Gospel and have been adopted children of God. And yet, that exhortation is still the holy Law of God, still the very solemn and weighty admonition of the Scriptures. And, why is it given, but because the Lord knows that the Church wanders through this world as if travailing a dangerous – sometimes painful – wilderness. As the Church militant, she must verbally combat many with the Word of Truth and suffer much for her confession and bear

the burdens and scars of life in this fallen world as she awaits her ultimate deliverance.

Notice that all three of our readings touch on that truth today – that truth that the Church on earth knows toil and tribulation as she awaits peace forevermore. Most notably in our Gospel reading, Jesus comforts all the faithful who patiently endure the pains of this life, promising them that “theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” And, again, He says, “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.” In our epistle reading, John admits that such blessing of Christ would mean nothing to the world: “The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” “Yes,” John admits, “the world does not know us.” Why would it when “what we will be has not yet appeared”? Why would it ‘know us’ or recognize the joy we take in God’s will for daily life, the confidence we take in hardship, the calm comfort we have in the face of death, the compassion we have in the face of hostility, the commitment we have to Christ... why would it ‘know us’ or understand these things when it hasn’t yet seen what we will be. Imagine how the world would honor and envy us if it could see the heavenly treasure and inheritance that belongs to us, if it could understand the title we claim as “children of God.”

But it doesn’t understand this; in fact, the world so completely mischaracterizes the Christian status as children of God that it considers the Church hypocritical, foolish, naïve... and the

faithless world out there brings nothing but insult and injury to the Church. Jesus himself says, “In this world you will have great tribulation,” and our first reading – even that glorious and majestic picture of the Church Triumphant gathered before the throne and before the Lamb – *even that* includes reference to ‘the great tribulation’, of which we all long to be free and eagerly look forward to our baptism carrying us out of... and into our inheritance.

So, the Scriptures are replete with description of the Church’s suffering this side of heaven. And, we have no reason to doubt God’s Word on the matter... does it not accurately and faithfully describe to us what we know in our own experience in life in this fallen world?

We know the trials caused by the world as it inflicts hardship upon us and upon itself...nation rising up against nation, nation rising up against the Church. Less institutionally, people against people and neighbor against neighbor. In our own society, fifty years ago, nearly all called themselves Christians... today, to be a Christian, to conduct one’s self as a Christian, is not so universally welcomed or even tolerated in our politically correct society. Today, the reality of suffering for the sake of the Gospel is much more tangible than it was fifty years ago in our land.

But, the tribulation we know is not limited to the influences of the world, but also can be credited to the temptations hurled upon us by the devil – those same age-old temptations of moral laxity or moral relativism, of seeing God’s moral Law as applying only

to 'my life in the Church,' but not to life in the world... same age-old temptations of chasing after any source of happiness to idolize and prioritize before God and His Holy Word and eternal promises.

And we need not spend a lot of time listing out those temptations since they also arise so quickly in the form of despair and doubt and despondency in the face of our aging and ailing bodies and our unrelenting march to the grave.

There's so much in our own bodies, so much from the devil and the world that constantly reminds us that the Scripture is right – we live in a world of great tribulation, a world that does not recognize the beauty, divinity, and eternal life of the Church, a world in which what we will be has definitely not yet appeared.

But that doesn't make us victims; the festival of All Saints is not about saying, "Woe is me, I'm a poor victim in this fallen world. God owes me something better." Rather All Saints day is about the exhortation to hold fast *specifically because* you have the promise of an inheritance of eternal life awaiting you! You have the promise that all that Christ did, He did for you. All that He won, He promises to share with you. And, he is not going to promise you salvation, achieve the merits of and purchase that salvation, nurture and feed you in that salvation, but then – for all who believe on His name – fail to see it through to the end. You can endure specifically because for you is the Gospel and an inheritance so brilliant, so joyous, so eternal

that the call to endure tribulation is not shrill, but is delightful and truly encouraging.

This is why the Holy Law, to the Christian, does not sound like “you must, you must not” – as if a dreadful list of rules for unwilling laborers driven by a taskmaster. Rather, for the Church, the Law sounds like this: “You *shall*...” it’s a description of what we *are* and desire in Christ, so that we joyfully confess God’s will this way: “Let us... let us hold fast.” This is our fervent desire, to abide in God’s Word (as we heard last week) and rejoice in being Christ’s disciples and in remaining steadfast in the truth that will set us free... free from our sin, free from our suffering, free from this tribulation.

Let us hold fast to Christ and His promises. Do we not have every reason to delight in Him and His Gospel? *He’s* the one who promises us that the kingdom of heaven is already ours. *He’s* the one who promises us comfort, the inheritance of the earth, the satisfaction of our hunger for righteousness, mercy, the title ‘sons of God’... even promises that we will one day behold God face to face.

And not only does Christ *promise* all this, but He has authority and power to deliver on those promises. As we hear in our first reading, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” Indeed, salvation belongs to Him, and He promises to freely bestow it upon us.

That’s what he’s doing when he baptizes our little ones – he’s making us sons and daughters and naming us in the book of life.

Furthermore, he's bestowing all he purchased and won on the cross... he's bestowing that upon us when he forgives us our sins; he's bestowing it upon us when he's feeding us His very body and blood, giving us *himself* that we might be strengthened to hold fast in confidence that Christ will not lie to or deceive or alienate or withdraw himself from those who share in Him... quite literally share in Him, "Take eat, this is my body; take drink; this is my blood, *for you.*"

"For you," he promises, that we may have the strength to continue to endure life in the great tribulation until he is ready to bring us to the other side of heaven... indeed, until we see him as He is and therefore know that we have been made like him... for only the holy can look upon the holy, only the perfect can see the perfect, only the incorruptible can behold the incorruptible. In the resurrection, St. John says, we will be like Christ, for we will be able to behold Him as He is... holy, perfect, incorruptible. Indeed, even now, the promise is ours, that we share all things in Christ, even the resurrection – "first, Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming, all who belong to Christ," St. Paul says... all who *share* in Christ.

For *this*, it is worth enduring. For *this*, let us hold fast. For, the day will come when this momentary affliction will have passed – as St Paul reminds us, "This momentary affliction is not worth comparing to the eternal glory that awaits us." The day will come when the trials and frustrations of this life will no longer even be a

distant memory, so that all tears will be wiped away... and those who have a share in Christ will see with their own eyes the Lamb in the midst of the throne... those who have a share in Christ will hear with their own ears the blessing which has (since your baptism) *been* yours by faith, but will one day – for the eternal day – be yours by sight: “Yours is the kingdom of heaven.”

In the Name of the Father  
And of the Son  
And of the Holy Spirit.  
+ AMEN +

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