

## Revelation 7:9-17 - “The Blessed End for God’s People”

Pr. Kurt A. Van Fossan - All Saints Day (observed) 2021

Last Sunday, for Reformation Day, we focused on the Church Militant—the Church on earth. We are militant because we are still fighting against the Babylonians of our day, the enemies of Christ and His Church in and around us. These enemies seek always to separate us from God, who comes to us through His Word and Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion to save us and keep us saved until He calls us to our eternal home.

That’s one of the reasons God, through the faith He has given us, has brought us here today; to strengthen our faith through His Word and the Lord’s Supper. This is not only for our own good but also for the good of others, many of whom are either oblivious to the danger they’re in or they have convinced themselves that they have nothing to fear. They, therefore, rely on God’s work through us to not only let them know what God’s word says about the ultimate effect of sin in them and around them, but also to set them free from their sins before it’s too late.

Who will believe and who will reject God’s message of salvation, which He has sent us to give to all people? God only knows. That may be one of the reasons why, in our first reading from Revelation, we’re told that “*no one could number*” those who will in the end believe. These words also remind us of God’s promise to Abraham: “*I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore*” (Genesis 22:17). Since God doesn’t give us an exact number, this should not concern us. It’s sufficient to know that the number will be complete and that we are a part of that number—that our names are written in “*the book of life*” (Php 4:3).

The Lord does, however (in the verses just before our text), give us some symbolic numbers, like the 144,000, which He divides up into 12 groups of 12,000, for the 12 tribes of Israel. These numbers speak of you and me, together with the rest of God’s people on earth—the Church Militant. We, like God’s people whom He set free from slavery in Egypt, are divided up into various groups or parts of the body, which are determined by the gifts and callings God gives us. Working together as the Lord’s Army, we are marching through this world with the sword of the Spirit—the Good News of God’s love and salvation for all people through Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Even though the numbers of God’s Church on earth fluctuates daily because of the number of those who are welcomed into the Church, the number of those who fall away from the Church, and the number of those who are called home, God gives us these symbolic numbers to assure us that in our fight against evil, God gives us all we need. Not only is His Church Militant perfect in number every step of the way, but we are perfectly equipped through God’s Word and Sacraments to carry out the mission work of His Church.

While the resistance is strong, and some who have been given faith in Jesus Christ will not only fall away but they will persecute us who believe in Him, God continues to remind us that before Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, He

was persecuted, suffered and died on a cross. Therefore, the troubles and persecution we experience in this life are not a sign that God and His work through us is failing. Instead, it's all part of God's plan which He allows and uses to achieve the ultimate outcome of what we hear of in our text about the Church Triumphant. *"For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their Shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*

Through this revelation of the family of God in heaven, God assures us that it's all worth it. Whatever God calls us to give up or suffer in this world in order to tell others the Good News of His salvation through Jesus Christ, it's worth it. For the *"reward"* of eternal life with God in heaven and/or paradise, which Jesus earned for us through His death and resurrection, far surpasses the things of this world, good or bad. As St. Paul writes, *"I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him"* (Php 3:8). *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us"* (Romans 8:18).

Part of that glory of God is the *"white robes"* that the saints in heaven are wearing are the same white robes that God placed on them and us at our baptism, or the moment He first gave us faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior. The fact that these robes have been made white *"in the blood of the Lamb"* also points to the suffering and death that comes before Jesus' resurrection and ascension into heaven. Since Jesus' suffered and died a damning death in order to pay for our sins, we surely have nothing to complain about when God, for the good of the Church, gives us a taste of what we deserve because of our sins. Thankfully it's just a taste of what Jesus experienced in our place when He went through hell for us.

By allowing us, in the light of God's Word, to witness and experience things like the collapse of society and the world around us, and the loss of our health and abilities (especially as we grow older), God enables us to live as humble saints as opposed to proud sinners. Have you ever noticed that at the center of the word "pride" is the letter I. Whether it's taking prIde in our families, in our community, in our good works, or in our sinful behavior, prIde has no place in the lives of God's people. By working through times of suffering to knock prIde out of our lives, and replacing it with His promises in Christ, God leads us to continue to give all glory, honor and praise to Him; the only one who can save us from our sins and death, and give us a glorious and eternal future in paradise with Him and the rest of His family, the Church.

All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

[Children's Sermon] Object - Have any of you ever played one of these Whack-a-Mole games? This one reminds me of our life in this world as God's children. When something in this world, like our sins or the sins of others knocks us down, what does God do? He raises us up again. [Let each of the children knock down a peg, and see another peg rise up.]

What's going to happen when we eventually get knocked down and we don't rise up again in this life—when we die? God will raise us up again in heaven with Him! We can be sure of this because of what Jesus did for us on the cross. When He died for our sins, He rose from the dead on the third day and eventually ascended into heaven. So now He rules with His Father and the Holy Spirit over all things in heaven and on earth, to make sure that when the things of this world knock us down, we have nothing to fear, because He will raise us up again with Jesus.