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The Festival of All Saints (transferred)

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
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“Where is Your Saintliness?”

Text: Isaiah 26:4 (Matt 5:1-12; Rev 21-22)

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

“Trust in the Lord forever,” says the prophet Isaiah, **“for the Lord is an everlasting rock.”** Trust in the Lord forever and for everything. Trust, despite what all those around you might say. Trust, despite what you see all around you. Trust, though the blessings and reward for your trust take a very long time in coming. Trust. Simply trust, Isaiah says. And he provides no conditions or excuses for not trusting – as if a lack of trust has any real basis to stand on. It does not. A lack of faith and trust in our Lord is simply sin. For not trusting is calling into question God’s goodness; it is doubting His mercy; it is to be skeptical of His promises. Yet what reason is there for this? Has God *ever* broken a promise? Has He *ever* failed to do what is just and right? Has He *ever* stopped loving His children? **“Trust in the Lord forever,”** says the prophet, **“for the Lord is an everlasting rock.”** And yet is this not what we have failed to do? Is this not what we confessed at the beginning of the service? Our faith and trust in God has failed. We are poor miserable sinners.

Yet this fact is also true of those we call saints, such as St. Peter and St. Paul and St. Thomas and St. Mary Magdalene and more. They are poor miserable sinners. For where is **Peter’s** saintliness when he denies his Lord three times or when he tells our Lord that He must not suffer on the cross? Where is **Paul’s** saintliness when he is persecuting Jesus by hunting down Christians, eager to imprison them and put them to death? Where is **Thomas’** saintliness when he doubts that the Jesus standing in front of him is the resurrected Christ? Where is **Mary Magdalene’s** saintliness when she prostitutes herself? Yet *these* are the ones our Lord calls “saints.” These are His friends, His closest allies and associates, His partners, His apostles, those who would carry on and establish His teaching and ministry “in His stead and by His command” after His ascension. No wonder the world despises the Church. The Church seems to have everything confused and upside down! Enshrining and esteeming such failures and sinners as saints! One might even wonder “What’s the difference?” If saints are sinners and sinners are saints, then the distinction doesn’t mean anything! The words have lost their meaning, and we – according to the world – are being hypocrites.

And so on this All Saints Day the question we must answer is this: Where is your saintliness, O Church? How do you have the audacity to use such a word for yourself?

It is a good question. And I won't beat around the bush! The answer is simply this: our saintliness is not in ourselves, it is in Christ. In Him alone. It does not lie within us, from what we are able to accomplish, or because we have lived up to certain standards. It is not because we, in ourselves, are good or holy or deserve such a high title and honor. Certainly not. No, saints are those whom our Lord has *gifted with sainthood*. The blessed are those whom our Lord has blessed with His blessing. And the holy are those whom our Lord has declared holy. These things do not come from us, but only from Him.

And that is the key. If you are looking for something within yourself – some attitude, some good work, some act, some amount of worthiness – you will never find it. Or if you do find something, it is only a delusion. A good work tainted by wrong motives; wrong motives born of a desire for self-glorification; and self-glorification disguised and hidden under false humility. In fact, to even begin to look inside yourself for something is to do the very opposite of what we heard from the prophet Isaiah. For to look inside yourself is not to trust in the Lord, but to trust in yourself; to trust that you will find *something* in you to hang your hat on; something that will make you worthy in God's eyes.

But Isaiah is pointing us *outside* of ourselves. He is pointing us to what truly makes a difference in our lives – not to what we have done, but to what the Lord has done. ***“Trust in the Lord . . . for the Lord is an everlasting rock.”*** The Lord who not only created you, but redeemed you. The Lord who is not far away, but very near. The Lord who knows everything about you. The Lord who came down from Heaven and became man. The Lord who walked upon this earth and who ascended the cross in your place. The Lord who came to live and die and live again for you. The Lord who forgives you all your sin. The Lord who has gone to prepare a place in Heaven for you. The Lord who will return and take you to be with Him, and give you eternal life. The Lord who has given you His promises, and keeps them. Trust in this Lord, and though you are a sinner, He declares you a saint.

Now, the world cannot see this saintliness, for it is looking in the wrong place – it is looking at us. And they see the same thing that we see when we look at ourselves! Not a saint, but a sinner! But God has told us of a different reality. That a saint is simply a sinner who knows he is a sinner, and looks to Christ for forgiveness. A saint is a sinner whose heart has been broken and crushed by the Law, and then healed and restored by the

Gospel. A saint is a sinner who lives a life of repentance, receiving all good things from God. That's the kind of saint Peter and Paul and Thomas and Mary Magdalene were; that's the kind of saint you and I are; and indeed, that's the only kind of saint there is. And so there is only one difference between a saint and a sinner, and its not good works! It is faith. Faith that looks to God in Christ Jesus and trusts Him for all that I have. Faith that looks to God in Christ Jesus for forgiveness, blessing, and life.

And so where is your saintliness, O Church? The answer is clear. It is in only one place: on the cross. On the cross where my sins were taken off of me and put upon my Saviour. On the cross where atonement for my sin was made. On the cross where the Son of God became a sinner, so that this sinner could become a holy son of God.

Where is your saintliness, O Christian? It is here in this place, where the cross of Christ is applied to your lives and given to you. Here, where repenting of my sins I hear the same words of forgiveness Christ spoke from the cross. Here, where I am washed clean from my sins in the Christ-filled waters of Holy Baptism. Here, where I eat and drink the once-crucified body and blood of Christ. Here, where the Word of God is spoken and enters my ears and heart and strengthens my faith.

Where is your saintliness? It is in Christ, for I am in Christ. In Him I am holy. In Him I am blessed. In Him I am regarded by the Father no longer a sinner, but now a saint. Not by merit, but by gift. By grace through faith in my Saviour Jesus Christ.

Now again, such saintliness the world cannot see, for the world judges us by our appearance, as it has done with all the saints, from the beginning, until now, and as it will to the end. But faith knows that the reality is quite different. Faith knows that there is a *Host Arrayed in White*. Faith knows that the saints who have gone before us do *From Their Labors Rest*. Faith knows that although we here may struggle, *They [there] in Glory Shine*. And faith knows that we will one day be there with them. In the city which needs no sun or moon, for the Lamb is its light. In the city with the water of life, flowing from the throne of God and from the Lamb of God. In the city where grows the Tree of Life, from which we are again invited to eat. None of this can be seen now, but we know it by faith. And of this city you are already a citizen. A saint. A son of the King.

And the King will make sure you get there. For as He has given you your faith, He will keep you in the faith, strong and secure. And though you may for now, for a while, suffer and struggle, you are blessed, for yours is the Kingdom of Heaven. It must be that way now, for now we live under the cross. But the day is coming, a *Yet More Glorious Day*, when all the saints will be united as one; all the saints whose names are in Christ. All the saints, including you. Until then, ***“Trust in the Lord . . . for the Lord is an everlasting***

rock.” Until then, confess your sin – and not only to God, but to each other! For saints are not “holier than thou,” but live lives of repentance. And until then, live in the joy and freedom and forgiveness given to you by Christ. Live, not as the saint you hope to become – but as the saint Christ says you already are!

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.