

2 November 2008  
The Feast of All Saints

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Saints and Children of God”

Text: 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12; Revelation 7:9-17

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

In the beginning, God created St. Adam and St. Eve. And He saw this man and this woman that He had made and behold, they were good. Very good. They were indeed *saints* - holy and blameless in the sight of God. They were without sin, and filled with true fear, love, and trust in God. They delighted in God and God delighted in them. And we **see what kind of love the Father ha[d] given to [them]** - they were children of God.

But then what is unholy came into the world, and never has there been a fall so far and so deep as the fall of St. Adam and St. Eve. In a moment, they fell from saint to sinner, from light to darkness, from Paradise to hell. No longer did they delight in God, now they ran from Him and hid.

*What was a Father to do? Well . . .*

In the beginning, God re-created St. Adam and St. Eve. He saw this man and this woman that He had made and behold, they were sinful. Very sinful. They were indeed fallen and had lost their fear, love, and trust in God. They hid from God . . . yet God *still* delighted in them. So while God's Word to them came true, that **in the day that you eat of [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you shall surely die** (Genesis 2:17) - and die they did, a great spiritual death - we **see what kind of love the Father [now gave] to them**, that He did not destroy them, but restored them. They are born again as children of God - children now by promise. For in that day, their Father promised to send them a Saviour. A Saviour to die their death, to atone for their sin, and to raise them to life again. So that the sainthood they gave up be given back to them again, by grace through faith in the promise of their Father.

Oh, things were not the same as before. The curse of sin now infected the world, and infected St. Adam and St. Eve. Toil and trouble would be theirs, their sainthood - as St. John told us today - now **hidden** in this world. Hidden in struggle, hidden in pain, hidden in death. But what is hidden, while out of sight, is real, and the Word, the promise, and the forgiveness of God to His children made again saints out of

sinners. And so St. Adam and St. Eve were good again. Not because of themselves, but because of the love of the Father, the work of the Son, and the life given by the Spirit. And so now, St. Adam and St. Eve stand in that **great multitude that no one can number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb**, clothed in robes made white by the blood of the Lamb, with palm branches in their hands, singing their unending hymn of praise for **the love the Father had given to [them]**, that they - proto-sinners, great sinners, poor, miserable sinners that they were! - that **they should be called children of God; and so they are . . . forever.**

That is what we are celebrating today: All Saints Day. Not our work in *being* saints, but God's work in *making* saints. For truly the story of St. Adam and St. Eve is our story as well. We who have inherited the sin of Adam and Eve and then followed in their footsteps of rebellion against God and mistrust of His Word. We too desire the forbidden fruits of this world, the pleasures of sin and the idolatry of the self - how often trading our birthright as sons and daughters of God for the porridge of worldly pleasures? How often hiding from God under weak excuses, extenuating circumstances, or the passing of blame?

And yet! **What kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God, and so we are!** We are, for we too have been re-created and raised to a new life from the death of sin in Holy Baptism. There, the Spirit that hovered over the waters and brought forth life in the beginning, again comes through those waters and brings forth life. For there we are born again as children of God. There the sin of us sinners is washed away, and we are made saints. There the darkness of sin is replaced with the enlightening work of the Spirit. There, all that sin has taken away from us is given back to us again. That all of us Adams and Eves be St. Adams and St. Eves again. Children of the promise.

For in the beginning, God's promise was given not only to Adam and Eve, but to all of us as yet unborn descendants of them, living in them (cf. Hebrews 7:9-10). And **what love the Father has given to us** in keeping that promise and sending His Son to be that promised Saviour. A Saviour to *descend* to us sinners, that we might *ascend* to Heaven with Him. And so Jesus was born - the Son of God descending from Heaven to serve us sinners. And that's who Jesus was always hanging out with, isn't it? Not just sinners, because everywhere you go in this world you bump into sinners - but always with the worst sinners, the bottom-of-the-barrel sinners, the everyone-knows-you're-a-sinner sinners. To show us the love of God. Not to meet us halfway, but to come all the way down to serve the worst sinners, so we can be sure Jesus came to serve and to save us. No one too low. No one beyond His reach, or His love. And then for all us sinners, to ascend the cross and die. Because He wasn't going back without us. He came to take our sins away from us and die for them, so that we could again be children of God and live His life. To be the saints

God created us to be.

*And so you are!* You are, for all the sin that has cast you down, that has separated you from God, and disqualified you from sainthood, has been forgiven. And so just like St. Adam and St. Eve, you are a saint again, not because of what you do, but because of what God has done for you. You are children of God not because (as the world wrongly says) “We’re all children of God” - but because you have been joined to Jesus, and in Him you are a child of God. In Him, you have been raised to a new life. In Him, you are restored to sainthood. And not a *pretend* sainthood, like children sometimes play house. That’s what the world thinks, right? That what happens here is just make believe, just play. No, God’s Word does what it says, and the same powerful Word that created all things from nothing in the beginning, now creates new life in you from nothing. And when Jesus says you are forgiven, you are. And if you are forgiven, then your sins are gone. And if your sins are gone, then you are a saint, a dearly loved child of God. ***What love the Father has given to us . . .***

But like St. Adam and St. Eve, though we are now saints, our sainthood is **hidden** in this world. That’s why the world looks at us and scoffs. That’s why the world looks at us and thinks this is all make believe. That’s why we sometimes look at ourselves and our sin and doubt. We don’t look like saints, and we often don’t act like saints. But again, what is hidden is real. And what makes us saints is not that we act like saints, but the Word, promise, and forgiveness of Jesus that makes saints out of sinners. And since it all depends on Him, we can be sure that it is true.

So what does the life of a saint look like? Jesus described it for us today in the reading from Matthew’s Gospel - *it is a life of blessedness hidden under the sin and suffering in this world*. A life of faith, that although we do not *feel* blessed, we know that we are. And so yes, saints do good works, but they may not ever be seen (like our prayers), or they may not ever be recognized as good works by the world (like when we speak up for the unborn and against sin). Saints live as strangers and aliens in this world, for we know there is more to life than the here and now. And saints live lives of repentance, knowing that the forgiveness of Jesus is our strength.

And so in other words, the life of a saint looks like the life of Jesus - for the life of a saint is the life of Jesus. We have no life apart from Him. But you know what that means? That our life now here **hidden** under the cross, will one day be **revealed** in Heaven. When we join all the saints who have gone before us - St. Adam and St. Eve and ***the great multitude that no one could number***. All who have ***washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb***. All who have eaten of the Tree of Life - the fruit of the tree of the cross, the body and blood of Jesus. All the sinners made saints, by grace through faith in Jesus. ***What love the Father has given to us . . .***

And so today is for us a day of great hope. To remember the great cloud of witnesses, all the saints who have gone before us, including our brother Tom, whom our Father called home this year. We remember their struggle; we remember their faith; we remember the goodness and faithfulness of Jesus that sustained them through it all. And we know that so it will be for us. Some of us are closer to that call home than others - *and age has nothing to do with it*. None of us knows when our Saviour will call. Until that day, we live as the saints of God. The saints that gather here at this altar with all the saints - the others hidden, just as we are hidden. But what is hidden is real. And so we join them and they join us for we are all in Christ and He is here for us, to feed us with His body and blood, with His Word, and with His forgiveness, Spirit, and life. And in Him, we are blessed. In Him, we are safe. In Him, we are children of God. In Him, we are saints.

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.