

1 November 2009  
The Feast of All Saints

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Remembering the Littlest Saints”

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

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

Throughout the church's year, we have many days set aside to celebrate the lives of saints and what God has done both *for* them and *through* them. Saints like Peter and Paul, John the Baptist, Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, and this past week (on Wednesday) Simon and Jude. But today, today is a day to celebrate *all the saints* - famous or not so famous, well-known or not known at all. All who are saints not because they are good, or because they lived a better life than everyone else, but because they were made saints, or holy ones, by the blood of Jesus. The blood of Jesus that washes away sins. The blood of Jesus that makes the unholy holy; making sinners into saints.

And so today, I remember my mother and the brother I never got to know. I remember the saints I have buried in my 14 years as a pastor. And I'm sure you have saints coming to mind now too. Today we thank and praise God, our Saviour and friend of sinners, for His goodness and mercy to them.

But recently, I have been thinking of some other saints to remember this day. Little saints, that are often forgotten - or that we are told to forget about: those little saints who are stillborn, or miscarried. If you are a parent who has suffered a miscarriage - and I know there are several of you here today - I know this is painful for you to think about. It is a confusing time and a sad time. Know that our hearts and prayers are with you, and if the good Lord has led you, like precious gold, through this Refiner's fire, you must be very special to Him indeed.

Children shouldn't die. They shouldn't die before they are born, they shouldn't die at all. But they do. And that they do is a testimony to the slavery of sin that grips us all, from the moment we are conceived, and a testimony to our need for a Saviour. And such a Saviour we do have! A Saviour who did not come into this world as a full-grown man, but took for Himself each and every stage of human life - beginning with conception, developing in the womb, enduring birth, growing as a child, a teen, a young adult. He has sanctified *all* human life in Himself, even the unborn and the new born - all are truly precious in His sight; all redeemed by His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. He is the Saviour of all.

And so while our world is filled with the propagandistic lie that children in the womb are not “real” or “true persons” or “fully human,” our Lord teaches a very different truth: these are lives given and created by Him. Little boys knit together by Him. (Ps 139) Little girls with meaning and purpose and value. Little children He loves deeply, even more than we. Little ones like Jeremiah and John the Baptist, who He knew before they were even born. (Jer 1:5) So it is with our children, even those who are never brought out of the womb. And how poignant to hear again the words of St. John, and think about these little saints: **“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”**

Sometimes our Lord seems too eager to hold our loved ones - more quickly and more closely than we desire. We want more time, any time. We have plans for them, and hopes and dreams. We want to know why. But to us is not given all the answers, we can only confess: The good and gracious will of God is done, whether or not we can know or understand His loving purpose for us. He has given men and women the great honor and privilege of participating in His great gift of life, but we must never forget that He is the Author and Giver of life, not us. We give birth, but He gives life. Life on earth, and life in heaven.

And, we confess, He brings life from death! For He who called Lazarus forth from the grave, and raised from the sleep of death the Widow of Nain's son and Jairus' daughter, also Himself came out of the tomb alive. For on the cross Jesus bore our sins and condemnation; on the cross He offered Himself as the sacrifice for all the sin of the world; on the cross He took upon Himself our curse and shame. Yet all this could not defeat Him. No, He defeated it! And so on the third day, He rose from the dead, leaving sin and death behind, once and for all. To give us hope. Hope at the end of life, at the beginning of life, and all through our life. That for us there is forgiveness. For us there is a future. For us there is life.

And this life is for all, for His cross and atonement is for all. Even for those little saints we never had a chance to hold, who never had a chance to see the sky, or hear a bird sing, or jump or dance or smile or laugh. Oh, what they see and hear now! For though we grieve, our Lord has delivered them from the pains and struggles of this world, from all our parental failures and shortcomings, and given them a seat at the “children's table” in heaven. For that is the only table there is in heaven, for **“whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”** (Mark 10:15)

But Pastor, you are thinking, how can you be so sure? Aren't the Scriptures silent on this matter? Well, yes and no. The Scriptures do not tell us everything, but they do tell us what we need to know. And while every situation is different, we do know this from God's Word:

We know that God desires all people to be saved. (1 Tim 2:4)

We know that God has promised to hear our prayers. (Isaiah 65:24; John 16:23)

We know that Jesus wanted even the littlest of children to come to Him. (Mark 10:14)

We know that children in the womb, like John the Baptist, can believe. (Mark 9:42; Luke 1:41)

We know that our Lord causes His Gospel to be preached not only in all the world, but **"to all creation."** (St. Mark 16:15)

We know that He has hidden many things from the wise and intelligent, but has revealed them to infants. (St. Matthew 11:25)

And most of all, **we know the power of God's Word.**

For it is the same Spirit-filled Word that has given each of us our faith. It is the same Spirit-filled Word that gives Baptism its power, and that makes mere bread and wine to be the body and blood of our Saviour. Shall we say that this Word - which has penetrated the walls of our hard and stony hearts - cannot penetrate the walls of the womb and give faith? *Which is really the greater miracle?*

And so it is not on pious wishes that we rest our hope, but on the power and promises and love of God our Saviour, and the strength of His Word. His Word which accomplished that for which He sends it, even when it falls upon the littlest and most helpless saints.

Yet there is also another story in the Scriptures which can also give us comfort today, and that is the story of David and the son that he lost - his son who died *on the seventh day*. That means that he died one day short of receiving the covenant and grace of circumcision - which is the Old Testament counterpart to Baptism. What of this child? David provides us with a wonderful example of faith. For after his son dies, David says: ***"While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for who could tell whether the Lord would be gracious to me, that the child might live? But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."*** (2 Samuel 12) *Did you hear that last line? I shall go to him.* The Word of God has given David such confidence! In both his own life, and the life of his son. So great is the power of the Word! The Word that is able to save sinners of all ages. The Word that saves you. The Word that saves all the saints.

For the Word of God is no mere word, but a person, a Saviour. The Word that was made flesh and named Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. (Matt 1:21) The Word that was poured out for us in love, and continues to come to us in love. A love greater than we can imagine. The Word that has called so many already into His loving arms, and who will one day call you as well. When that call will come for each of us, we know not. For those littlest saints, we do not even know if they

were sons or daughters. But our Lord knows. He knows everything about them - even if they have no hairs on their head yet to number (Matt 10:30) - and loves them. *Oh, does He love them.*

And so the Lord who brought great blessings out of the curse of the cross, will also bring great blessings to you and to your children. **Blessed are you**, Jesus told us today. Over and over and over. So greatly He wants to bless.

And so on this All Saints Day, we remember *All the Saints, Who From Their Labors Rest*. (LSB #677) But we not only *remember* them, we *gather* with them here, for we are all gathered at our Lord's Table, where our Lord comes to us in His body and blood. For we all are united in Christ - we on this visible side, they on the invisible side. And so they *are* here with us. Everyone of them - both those who lived a long life, and those who on this earth never talked or gurgled or ate, yet who now eat the feast which has no end and sing with the choir of angels. Here we are as close to them as we can be, until it is time for us too to depart this world in the peace of Christ. Or as we will sing later:

*Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine!  
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;  
Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine.  
Alleluia! Alleluia!* (LSB #677 v. 4)

So come, you who rejoice, you who grieve, you who struggle, you who are heavy laden. Come and receive the forgiveness and life of Him who is faithful, whose Word is true, who so greatly desires to bless all children of men. Your Saviour is with you on the way, no matter who you are, no matter where that way leads you. And He is coming to lead you home, to join the *Host, Arrayed in White*. (LSB #676) That **great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages . . . and ages**. Blessed are they, and blessed are we. All the saints, safe in Christ, now and forever.

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.

*(Many thanks to Pastors Esget, Marquart, Petersen, and Stuckwisch, whose own sermons on this topic I used to help me write this sermon.)*