

7 November 2021  
The Feast of All Saints  
with baptism of Viktoria Adelheid Powers

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Heard and Not Seen”

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

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

It once was said that saintly children are “seen and not heard.” You can agree with that or not. [I think Viktoria disagrees!] But today, as we commemorate All Saints Day, know that in the church the reality is exactly the opposite. In the church, saintly children of God are “heard and not seen.”

For what does a saint *look* like?

There is no one right answer to that question, of course. As we heard today from Revelation, they are ***from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages***. They are of every color and from every nation. They are young and old, rich and poor, male and female, the successful and powerful and the outcast and weak.

In heaven, we know what they look like. They are ***clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands***. But on earth, they are hidden. The saints don’t look like saints. A person who, to the world, looks cursed, a person the world looks down upon, may in fact be a saint in God’s eyes. While a person who looks blessed, who is held up as an example for all, and who looks like a paragon of worldly virtue, may in fact be no saint at all. Looks are deceiving. Think of the story Jesus told of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16), or those in our day who had great falls from worldly esteem - even church leaders *thought* saintly, until it was found out they were not.

The truth is, saints suffer. They are persecuted. They endure tribulation. They weep. They struggle. They are ***poor in spirit***. They ***mourn***. They ***hunger and thirst for righteousness*** - because they aren’t, righteous. They are reviled and hated. They are lied about and spoken of as evil. And they are because all these things are true of Jesus, who said: *If they hated Me, they will hate you, and if they persecuted Me, they will persecute you as well* (John 15:18-20).

Think of Abraham, who after being called by God never received a home of his own. Or Jacob, who deceived and was deceived. All the prophets who were rejected, hated, and killed. The apostles and early Christians who were martyred. And Christians today who

are being called phobes, haters, and bigots, who are losing their jobs and businesses, and still being martyred. And it's not going to stop, because sin isn't going to stop and satan isn't going to stop. It's going to get worse, in fact. And saints will look less and less like saints and more and more cursed, and the evil will look more and more blessed and accepted and successful. For that's how things go in an upside-down, sinful, and sin-filled world.

Leading many to wonder: Why doesn't God stop it? Why doesn't He turn this world around? Because, as Jesus said: *My kingdom is not of this world* (John 18:36). His kingdom is greater than this world. John gives us a glimpse of that in Revelation. But only a glimpse. But a glimpse is enough.

But it's not what was seen in Revelation that caught John's attention, or that captures us - but rather what was heard. We heard that there, those who ***hunger*** here shall hunger no more. Those who ***thirst*** here shall thirst no more. Those who are ***stricken*** with the heat of persecution here will be sheltered. And those who here weep will be comforted, for God Himself ***will wipe away every tear from their eyes***.

And then we heard from Jesus' own mouth: ***Blessed*** are you poor in spirit, you mourners, you meek. ***Blessed*** are you who hunger and thirst for righteousness in an unrighteous world, you merciful, you pure in heart in an impure world, you peacemakers in a world of sin and strife. ***Blessed*** are you when you are persecuted, reviled, and spoken against. ***Blessed are you. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.*** Whether you are ever rewarded here on earth or not, esteemed on earth or not, valued on earth or not. Great is your reward in heaven. Great are the promises stored up for you in Christ Jesus.

That's what ***saints*** hear and believe. That's what the ***world*** hears and scoffs at. The world that speaks a different word, believes a different truth, and seeks a different reward - one now, not later. A kingdom of this world.

But this world is passing away. The world knows it, and so is trying to save it, with all their strength and with all their wisdom. This is all they have, all there is for them. But saints know that when this world passes away, there is more. Much more. More life. Better life. The life that our Lord has told us about, and promised. Life that He won for us by His death and resurrection. Life that awaits us after our own death and resurrection, when we die and rise with Him.

So in a world that is dying, and with saints who are dying and hidden under the sin and death of this world, saints are known not by how they look, **but by what they speak**. That is, what they confess. This confession of where their sainthood is. That it is not of us or from us, but from Jesus. It is a gift not earned, but freely given. Not of works, but of grace. **Saint are "heard and not seen."**

So saints who are **poor in spirit** not proud in spirit, confess their sin and receive **the kingdom of God** in the forgiveness of their sins. *For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation* (Small Catechism).

Saints who **mourn** death confess the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and are **comforted** by the hope of a life that death cannot end.

Saints who are **meek** confess that we have no right to be children of God, nothing in us that would or should make God desire us, and yet, as John told us today: *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.* Baptized children of God, inheritors of all that is His.

Saints who **hunger and thirst for righteousness** open their mouths here and confess that this food is no mere earthly food, but the Body and Blood of the crucified and risen Jesus, that makes us righteous. And we are filled, **satisfied**.

Saints cry out *Lord, have mercy!* And are **merciful**. That is, filled with mercy.

Saints speak of forgiveness that washes away sin and makes **pure of heart**. For the forgiveness displayed on the cross and spoken from the cross and won for us on the cross is **where we see God**.

Saints confess the **peacemaker**, the one who made peace between God and man on the cross, the Son of God. And in Him are **called sons of God**.

This, the Beatitudes we heard today, are what saints sound like, for through the Word saints are made, through the Word saints are forgiven, and through the Word saints are saved. The Word made flesh who gave himself to us and still does. Who lives in us even as we live in Him. And so we are blessed. Not, perhaps, with earthly blessings which can be seen, but with heavenly ones that are not now, but will be. For again, as John said: *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.*

Then we will see and be seen. But now we are "heard and not seen."

But here or there, now or later, **we are blessed**. Because what we have in common with those saints who have gone before us is that **our life is in Christ Jesus**. And when your life is in Christ Jesus, you are blessed, for your life is safe from the trials and tribulations, the revilings and persecutions, of this world. For you have a life they cannot end or take away. So let them do their worst! They cannot have you. You are baptized, you are absolved, you are fed - you belong to Jesus.

And then, too, as you live in Christ Jesus He lives in you. What He speaks, you speak.

What He does, you do. Because that is who you are. A child of God, a son or daughter of God, in Him. And when you fail - whether it is because of persecution or tribulation, or because of your own weakness - when you fail in your speaking, in your living, to be the child of God you are, *He does not fail you*. He remains faithful with His forgiveness and life for you. He keeps giving and restoring and lifting you up. So you are blessed. For He who would not come down from the cross but stayed there for you, will not leave you now.

**So saints are heard, not seen.** First and foremost by the voice of God who calls us saints, who calls us His children. [Like His voice who named Viktoria His child today and made her His in these waters.] Secondly by our voice of confession - confessing who we are as poor, miserable sinners, and confessing who He is, the Saviour of poor, miserable sinners like us. And then thirdly, by the Word of God we speak as we forgive those who sin against us, as we speak mercy and comfort, as we speak of the cross that saves us.

And so we are triply blessed. By the one whose blessing knows no end. Blessed with those in Jesus who have gone before us, blessed with those in Jesus who are with us here, and blessed with those in Jesus still to come. Truly, *a great multitude that no one could number*. No one, that is, but Jesus. The great Shepherd who knows each and every sheep by name, and calls us each by name. And who will one day call you home, to His home and yours, to join that great throng around His throne. There, where you - and all the saints - will be both seen and heard.

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.