

5 November 2023
The Feast of All Saints

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Fearless Saints in Christ”

Text: Revelation 7:2-17; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12

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

A scared world needs a fearless church.

I came across that quote this week and thought it a perfect theme for All Saints Day this year. Both because All Saints Day is about the confidence we have in Christ Jesus to be a fearless church. And because our world and so many people today are scared. And maybe like never before.

Scared of war breaking out in the Middle East, or of that war becoming a global conflict, even another World War. Scared for our children and the world they are growing up in - a hyper-sexualized world, a world that seems more polarized than ever. Scared by AI, what it might mean for our world, or that it will take away my job. Scared to go out at night, scared to ride the subway. Scared of what other people think of me, scared of disease, scared that if I open that email my computer will get infected. Scared that saying the wrong thing will get me labeled a bigot or a hater. Scared to be with other people, yet scared to be alone. Scared to love, scared to live, but also scared to die. Scared to let people know who I really am, and let them into my life. Or, to use some of the things we heard in the Holy Gospel this morning, scared to be meek, or merciful, or poor in spirit, because people like that get taken advantage of. Scared to be righteous, because they are persecuted.

Is it any wonder there's so much mental illness in our world with all that going on? So many on edge? So many confused. So many nervous wrecks. So many who don't know what to do or where to turn. So many ready to just give up.

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All Saints Day reminds us that whatever happens in this world and in your life, you are safe and secure. You are not alone. You have a heavenly Father who holds you in His hands and close to His heart. A heavenly Father who knows the past, the present, and the future - nothing is a surprise to Him. A heavenly Father who keeps His promises and will not let you down. A heavenly Father who has a glorious future prepared for those who love Him, who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, His Son, and put their

faith in Him. A heavenly Father who would direct our eyes and our hearts to Him - to Him who loves us; to Him whose perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18).

For we have a heavenly Father who knows each and every one of His own. The exact number of those who have been sealed by God with the sign of the cross on their foreheads. The **12,000 from each tribe** indicates this. It is a symbolic number - 12 being the number of completeness, or fullness, and 1,000 indicating magnitude. The meaning being that our heavenly Father knows the exact number of His saints on earth - no one forgotten, no one left behind, no one lost in the crowd. **And that includes you.** You may not be known or noticed by anyone else; but you are never out of the sight of your heavenly Father, who loves you and cares for you.

But the church is made up not only of the saints on earth but the saints in heaven, and here, too, what confidence we have! For after his vision of the saints on earth, John then sees the saints in heaven - ***the ones who have come out of the great tribulation***. I guess that's both good news and bad news. The bad news: there is great tribulation here on earth! But the good news is: it did not overcome them! They came out of it, were rescued from it. And this is ***a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages***. These in white robes, robes washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. The blood of the Lamb poured upon them in Holy Baptism and Holy Absolution and given them in the Holy Supper. No rage or spite of satan could separate them from the love of their heavenly Father in Christ Jesus. **And that's your future** - provided by, promised by, and secured by, your brother and Saviour Jesus.

Yes, as John told the saints in his Epistle, *see* - literally *see*! - what John saw in his vision. ***See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are***. Children, who will be with Him. Children, with a place at His side. Children, with a home forever. **That's who you are!** And that vision, your future. Even though it may not seem so now. Even if you don't look special, even if you've got more problems and struggles than most. John says, ***what we will be has not yet appeared***. For now, children of God are hidden, and sometimes under a LOT of garbage in this world! ***But we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is***. When Jesus comes again, we shall join that great multitude, all the saints who have gone before us. Even though, for now, it's true what we sang: *We feebly struggle, they in glory shine* (LSB #677 v. 4).

But even now, that's you. That's who you are. You might be a mess! But you are blessed. You are a dearly loved child of God. Yours is the kingdom of heaven. Not because you've earned it or deserve it, but because Jesus did, and gives it to you.

And so blessed, that enables you to be what Jesus described in the Beatitudes we heard this morning. For when Jesus says ***blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart,***

the peacemakers, the reviled and persecuted, those things reveal our blessedness. We can be those things, do those things, not in order to be blessed, *but because we already are.* When you already have the blessedness of Jesus, His forgiveness and life and the promise of His kingdom, you can live this way. You can live like Him. For what can this world give you that you do not already have in Jesus? So you can be ***Poor in spirit***, not prideful and boastful. ***Mourning*** the sin in you and in the world and the death it brings. ***Meek***, humble, self-forgetful. ***Hungering and thirsting*** not for the things this world holds up as truth and treasure, but for what really is: ***righteousness***. ***Merciful***, not demanding. ***Pure in heart***, not lustful or licentious, permissive or promiscuous. ***Peacemakers***, forgivers, not grudge holders or dividers. And ***reviled and persecuted*** for proclaiming the truth and sticking to it.

These things don't bring blessedness, but reveal it. They reveal a life in you that is different. **That is fearless!** That gives what cannot be taken away because it has been given you by Jesus. And then on top of that, Jesus promises you even more. The more you give, the more you receive. Even joy in the midst of a world of great tribulation and filled with fear.

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And notice there, an important word: a fearless church. The church being those united in Christ, in the Body of Christ. All of us together. That's important, and why satan keeps trying to divide us. Because he knows that apart, separate, isolated, alone, we make bad decisions, fear often gets the better of us. We forget what we know, or should know. We doubt, we wander, we get tempted and seduced. We don't be who we are; we don't live as the blessed. We fall and mess up and get lost. You know it. It's happened to you.

But here we come together. Here we are united in Christ. Here we see what is bigger than us, and that I am not alone. That my struggles and problems are not unique to me. Here are folks who have come out of those same great tribulations. Here are folks who have sinned and been forgiven with the forgiveness I need! Here are folks who know me and love me anyway. Here in Christ is the love I need, given me not only by Christ in His Word and Sacraments, but in these people He has given me to love me. On my own, maybe I am filled with fear. **But here, I am part of a fearless church.** A church that knows the truth of God's Word and the confidence that comes with that firm foundation.

So if you find yourself fearful instead of fearless, don't beat yourself up - come and receive the perfect love that casts out fear. Hear those words that recall your baptism into Christ and all the promises given you there. Hear those words which forgive you all your sins - so there is nothing to separate you from the love of Christ. Hear those words which speak of Christ triumphant over sin, death, devil, hell, and all the powers of this world. And hear those words which give you that same triumphant Body and Blood in the Supper, to feed you and strengthen you. Hear and receive this perfect love that casts out

fear, and leave this place firm and confident. And fearless! For you have Christ. And He has you.

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That, it seems to me, is what All Saints Day is all about. Not only that we're saints, though we are. Not only that we have a glorious future promised us, though we do. But that we are saints with this glorious future **to be a fearless church in a scared world**. To show them a better way. To show them and give them the love they need. To bless them with the blessing we have received. That all be saints,

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,

Through gates of pearl stream[ing] in, a countless host,

Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: Alleluia! Alleluia! (LSB #677 v. 8)

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.