

All Saints Sunday-November 5, 2023  
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish  
Revelation 7:13-17 and Ephesians 1:11-14  
"Who Are These Robed in White?"  
Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Dear Saints of God, Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from His Son, Jesus Christ by whose blood you now are now robed in white. Amen

This past September, the featured speaker at the South Dakota Synod Fall Theological Conference encouraged preachers to not be afraid to preach from the book of Revelation. There are frightening images in the book of Revelation and there are references to events that will occur before Christ comes again and can leave believers confused. This is not the intent of this vision that John received. It is to give faith that when Jesus comes again, you and I will be counted among the hosts in heaven. On this All-Saints Sunday get an encouraging description of what is in store for you and I from the vision that was revealed to John as he received a glimpse of heaven.

The reading for today begins with the words, "after this". Before this, someone had been busy. Someone had just finished counting 144,000 people who were gathered around the throne of God. 12,000 people from each of the 12 tribes of Jacob had entered through the gates of heaven. Now John turned his sights from this crowd of 144,000 saints and saw even a greater multitude of people that was so large that it couldn't be counted. This innumerable crowd of people were not all from the Midwest of the United States. They spoke different languages and were of different colors and were from every nation and they came in all sizes and shapes. But they all had the same message. They cried out together, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb! They all were wearing robes of white and had palm branches in their hands. They were celebrating a victory. A victory of a battle they did not fight. A victory that was won completely by shedding the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ.

Then came the question by one of the elders that is often asked on All Saints Sunday. "Who are these robed in white, and where have they come from?" Other questions that follow are: What makes someone a saint? Or What makes a person holy? Do you have to die first to become a saint?

It is good to be reminded how one becomes a saint since it is so often confused by what we hear in the news today or in the world around us. I heard a news anchor interview a person whose family member died in the horrific recent shooting in Maine. This person perished while attempting to save others. This person who died was labeled as a hero. The people that stopped after seeing a lone person on the baseball field in Renner were called heroes because they quickly administered CPR and saved the life of the man who was having a heart attack. Make no mistake about it, what wonderful things these people did deserve to be told and efforts are commendable, and we need more caring people in our world, but what this person did not raise them to sainthood. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and Paul did not receive the title of saint because they were authors of books in the bible. Stephen did not become a saint by losing his life for the sake of his faith when he was stoned to death. No one becomes holy, by what they do here on earth.

The large crowd of people that gathered around the throne of God were given white robes that had been washed in the blood of the Lamb. Jesus always works under the sign of opposites. If you wanted to get a white garment to be sparkling clean, your best bet would be to try Tide Ultra and spike in a half a cup of baking soda. No one would consider it logical to wash a garment that you wanted to become white as snow by washing it in blood. Anyone that does a little laundry knows that blood stains, blood is not used to make clean. But that is how all the saint's white robes became sparkling clean. They each had to be washed in the blood of the Lamb. The stains that were on the garments were the sins that each of the saints had committed. Every one of the stains of sin were removed by hearing the words, "You are forgiven." They became holy and saintly by hearing and believing that their sins were forgiven.

The good news for each of us is that we do not have to wonder if we will be counted among the multitude of saints someday. The reading from Ephesians proclaims that in Christ, we have also obtained an inheritance. Our sainthood is in the present, not in the future. We do not have to die to receive our inheritance. It is yours today. Jesus is the one who had to die for us, and he has already done this. Jesus Christ's last will and testament has declared you an inheritor of all the work he has done for you.

We are all inclined to want to provide some kind of proof that we deserve to be given Christ's inheritance. If you were asked why, you know that you will be counted among the saints on earth and in heaven, what would you say? Paul has given you the words to say, "I am a saint when I heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit. And when were you marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit? It was when you were claimed as a child of God in the waters of your baptism.

Today we remember all the saints. We give thanks for the saints who gave their lives for the sake of the gospel. We give thanks as we remember all the saints who have received the seal of the promised Holy Spirit in baptism in our parish and throughout the world. And we remember the saints who have died in Christ from our parish and community this past year. For many of us, we still mourn. But today, we know that we will be comforted as we too have heard this gospel of salvation that is ours. It is yours. Yours today. And for this we give thanks to Jesus Christ who has robed you in his righteousness. Amen