

“God’s Children Now”

Look around. What do you see? Wars. Polarity. Political gridlock. Sickness. Death. Everyone doing what is right in their own eyes – satisfying the desires of the flesh. Our own failures – shortcomings – things that keep us up at night – causes of harm to others, and guilt for ourselves.

Dearly beloved, not everything is as it seems. What we do not see is God – the Lord God Almighty who sees all things – sees all things as they truly are.

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.” God, our loving Father, reveals to us – by His Word – what we need to know, what we are to believe. He reveals His truth, what is true – regardless of what we see, or think, or believe – regardless of what the world says is true. His Word is true – even if NO ONE believes it.

“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He [that is, Jesus] appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.”

As the beloved children of God, we live by faith, not by sight. What we see, experience, observe – is not always what faith teaches us. To live by faith is to live by faith in Jesus Christ – and in Him – we see what is “Already, not yet.” In Christ we see what is ALREADY true – but NOT YET seen with our eyes.

What is real? What is true? Well, what does God say in His Holy Word, in the Bible, the Holy Scriptures? By His Word, our heavenly Father is revealing to us – and to all with ears to hear – what is true.

Our Scripture readings for this Feast of All Saints’ do a wonderful job of revealing to us who we are as the “children of God.” God Himself is speaking to you – telling you who you are.

In the reading from the Revelation to St. John, chapter 7, we hear this: “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come ... These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

We see the “great tribulation,” but we don’t see the “white robes.” God is showing us the saints – that is, all believers in Christ. All who are coming out of the “great tribulation” of this world are set before our eyes. The believers are “clothed in white robes” – they are “saints,” literally, “holy ones” – cleansed from all impurity, wickedness and sin – through the blood of the Lamb.

The Scriptures would also speak of these saints as the Baptized – those whom Christ Himself has cleansed by His blood through the waters of Holy Baptism. His blood, shed upon the cross of Calvary to atone for the sin of the whole world – now cleanses the sinner in the waters of Holy Baptism. As the OT Scriptures would say – “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.” (Isaiah 1:18)

Again, this is not how we see it. We still know the weakness of our flesh, how easily we give into temptations – staining our garments with all manner of wickedness. Yet God says that ALREADY you are cleansed in the blood of the Lamb, even though NOT YET does it look that way to you.

Earlier in Revelation 7 – all the saints, all the believers – are described as: “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages ...” Which, by the way, should also make clear to you that – if you don’t like certain nations, tribes, peoples, languages – you are not going to like heaven.

This “great multitude” of those who live by faith in Jesus Christ are further described as – “standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”

Is not that your cry, even NOW? In faith, you don’t look to yourself for your standing before God – but only to Jesus, the Lamb – whose blood cleanses you from all sin, making you holy – and reconciling you to your heavenly Father.

That's who you are ALREADY even though you do NOT YET see and experience the fullness of what it means that you are "in Christ" by faith. ALREADY, here this morning, in this Divine Service, you cry out that "Salvation belongs to our God" – even though, NOT YET, do you see and hear the "great multitude" of believers who join you in the confession of that truth.

The truth is that you still live in this world – surrounded by the "great tribulation" – suffering from your own sinfulness and the devastation of the fallen world that inflicts you with all manner of pain and persecution. ALREADY you have rest with God because of what Jesus has done for you, and given to you – but you are NOT YET fully at rest.

So your heavenly Father gives you rest, by giving you hope in what is certain and sure, even when your rational mind tells you otherwise. Through faith in Christ, you have a refuge in the midst of this tribulation. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Though scorched by sin and parched by guilt – Jesus leads you to the "living waters" of His gracious forgiveness – cleaning you, making you holy, and wiping away your tears. That is why you are called "blessed" in the Gospel reading – for you are blessed to live by faith in Christ.

"Beloved, [you] are God's children NOW, and what [you] will be has not yet appeared; but [you] know that when [Jesus comes again on the Last Day, you] shall be like Him, because [you] shall see Him as He is" – resurrected from the dead, living forever. And so also you will live – with God the Father and the Holy Spirit – and will All the Saints – blessed forevermore. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.