

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Today a word rings out as we celebrate the Feast of All Saints. Like the church bells tolling at one of Zion's funerals, we hear the bell toll today: "Blessed." We just sang it: "For all the saints who from their labors rest," who confessed the name of Jesus, "be forever blest" (LSB677). It is a reminder of "*the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.*" For "a voice from heaven" instructed John: "*Write this: Blessed — μακάριοι — are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.*" "*Blessed indeed,*" says the Spirit, "*that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!*" (Rev. 14:12-13).

"*Blessed,*" Jesus tolled as He taught the crowds on the mount. μακάριοι — blessed. "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, ... Blessed are those who mourn, ... Blessed are the meek, ... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, ... Blessed are the merciful, ... Blessed are the pure in heart, ... Blessed are the peacemakers, ... Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, ... Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.*"

What is this heavenly reward? St. John the Divine tells us. It is to be "*standing [with the great multitude] before the throne [of God] 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!'*" Jesus tells us the same as a hint in one of His beatitudes. "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*" To be in God's presence, to behold Him face to face, to join the heavenly chorus to sing His praises, to be shepherded by the Lamb, to drink of the living waters, to have all our weeping and mourning wiped away as the tears from our eye — this is heaven.

For this, though, we must wait. Many claim they want to see God; even unbelievers claim they want to see Him. Of course, they want to do it so that they can prove to themselves that God exists — that's a bit arrogant. God is not dependant on our proofs of His existance. Besides, they are without excuse. God has revealed Himself, that is, "*his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature ... ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made*" (Rom. 1:20). But they suppress the truth (Rom. 1:18).

Perhaps this longing to see God and walk with Him again, as Adam did, is part of our being, a remnant perhaps of man's friendly status with God in the beginning, a yearning for something that will not be satisfied for us until the consummation of all things. For unlike Adam before the fall, we cannot in this life

walk with God or behold Him in unveiled splendor. We can only still walk in God's magnificent garden — the creation, and, through it, obtain a veiled picture of God.

For it's a dangerous thing for fallen man to see God's unveiled glory. Moses wanted to. "*Please show me your glory,*" Moses pleaded with God (Ex 33:18). You might think that God would have granted this request. After all, Moses said, "*Please.*" Moreover, Scripture says, "*the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend*" (Ex. 33:11). And the Lord said to Moses, "*My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.*" And again, "*you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name*" (Ex. 33:14, 17). Yet, God replied to Moses' request, "I cannot do it." "*[Y]ou cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.*" (Ex. 33:20). Not even Moses, not even God's "friend," could see God and live.

Why not? Simply because impurity cannot remain in the presence of the Pure and Holy One. And since the fall, man naturally is impure. Man naturally cannot see God and live.

Man naturally is impure in the heart, which the Scriptures identify as the locus of man's thinking and his attitude. Jesus teaches us, "*what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come*" all sorts of evil things (Matt. 15:18-19). Similarly, the prophet Jeremiah speaks of natural man's sinful heart: "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick ...*" (Jer. 17:9). All we need do is look into our heart — especially in light of God's law — and we realize the truth of Jesus' and Jeremiah's teachings; our hearts are not pure; they are desperately sick. We cannot see God's face and live.

Yet in this life God did on occasion allow His people to see Him in a veiled way. God allowed a veiled view of Himself to Moses: "*while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen*" (Ex. 33:22-23). Earlier too, God had allowed a veiled vision of Himself for Moses and the elders at the foot of Mt. Sinai: "*they saw the God of Israel. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank*" (Ex. 24:10-11). These chosen few "saw God" as they ate of a peace offering sacrifice.

Later too, the people were permitted to see God, though still veiled — veiled in flesh, wrapped in the swaddling cloths of weakness and folly. By His incarnation, God Himself came down from heaven to earth to walk again with mankind, offering up only glimpses of His divine glory. And then, this lamb without spot or blemish was slain, sacrificed for the sins of the world. By His self-offering, He restored peace between God and man. A chosen few got to witness this, too, and how this Lamb rose from death and ascended to God's right hand,

there to receive the everlasting praises of those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

But now WE get to see God. As Jesus offers the fruit of this sacrifice, God's own peace offering of Himself, His body and His blood eaten and drunk, we in an even greater way than the Old Testament saints get to see God. As we sing in our communion hymn, "Here, O my Lord, I see Thee face to face" (LSB631). Yes, in Holy Communion, we get to taste and see our good God.

But there is still more, for Holy Scripture describes a time when His people will literally behold Him. For in the resurrection, we are promised, "*after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another*" (Job 19:26-27). Saint John the Apostle wrote in our epistle: "*it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is*" (1 Jn 3:2). God's people will thus see God as He is in unveiled splendor, not because they have been extra good, but because God in Christ has made sinners into saints, people who are holy.

Not that this holiness comes naturally to us sinners. Born in sin, it takes more Divine intervention to make us holy and acceptable for the kingdom of God. We must be born from above to be called "*children of God.*" Thus, St. Paul tells us: "*you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God*" (1 Cor. 6:11). Holy Baptism washed away your sins; cleansed by the ruddy waters of Holy Baptism you now wear the spotless white robe that gives you entrance to God's heavenly kingdom; justified by faith in Christ Jesus, God has taken your hearts as Jeremiah describes them — deceitful and sick — and made them pure, healthy, holy. He has made you saints.

Dear children of God, in this life we live with the now and the not yet. We "*are God's children now,*" and yet we know there is something more. We poor in spirit are blessed, for ours is the kingdom of heaven, and yet we are not as blessed as "they whose toils have ended. ... They have arisen From the cares which keep us still in prison. We are still as in a dungeon living, Still oppressed with sorrow and misgiving; Our undertakings Are but toils and troubles and heartbreakings" (LSB679).

Truly, for us now as God's children, we toil to live as saints; beholding Christ by faith, we strive to love and live for others in the name of Christ. But it is not drudgery, for we know that for those who have preceded us in death, and for us who await Christ's great and glorious return, "*what we will be has not yet appeared.*" For Christ will come again, and "*when he appears we shall be like him.*" Then we, who have hoped in Him, will have been purified in Him, and with a pure heart "*we shall see him as he is.*" In that day, we shall with faces unveiled

The Pure in Heart Shall See God

1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12

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Pastor Douglas Punke

and eyes uncovered see God in all His glory, just as Jesus promised, *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”* And waving our palm branches, we shall join the heavenly chorus, singing: *“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”* Oh, how blessed are our faithful loved ones, called to glory. Oh, how blessed are we, His saints.

In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Recitation of Zion’s saints.

Thank you to District President Dr. Daniel Brege for his “Cross Words” that inspired this sermon.