

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Today we celebrate the Feast of All Saints, though you know that the feast day is November 1st. Reformation is on the Eve of All Saints and the All Saints feast is the next day. That makes it hard to celebrate both on Sundays without transferring one or both. This year, Reformation fell on Sunday; we've transferred All Saints to this Sunday.

The extra week was helpful for me as I thought about this festival. The Feast of All Saints is a day to think on "the holy Christian church, the communion of saints." This "blest communion, fellowship divine" which we remember and of which we sing is not merely "the saints who nobly fought of old." Surely, we do remember them fondly and with thanksgiving. Surely "*we are surrounded by [a great] cloud of witnesses*": Old Testament saints Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, and more; New Testament saints Mary and Joseph, Peter, James, John, and the other disciples, Mary Magdalene, Mary and Martha, James and Jude, Paul —men and women of faith.

Surely, the generations that followed these Biblical saints also had their prominent saints who are remembered for their fight — proclaiming in word and deed Jesus, who came in the humility of our flesh, and who in that flesh "*endured the cross, despising the shame,*" who rose victorious from the grave and ascended back to heaven to be "*seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*" These saints — Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, to name a few early ones — met their demise violently, yet confessing the faith. They are saints.

Surely, the list of commemorations in the front of our hymnal also include Lutheran saints, though admittedly, we rarely add that title to their names: Confessors Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon, Artists Lucas Cranach and Albrecht Dürer, Pastors Johannes Bugenhagen and Wilhelm Loehe, Kantors Johann Walter and J. S. Bach. These, too, are saints.

But in our Hymn of the Day, we rightly sing praises to God, not just for them, but "For all the saints who from their labors rest, Who Thee by faith before the world confessed, Thy name, O Jesus." We will name those today who from this earthly Zion were translated to the heavenly Zion in this past year, who fought the good fight, who finished their race, who kept the faith. They may not have done anything such that historians will write about them, but their names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. They now have the crown of righteousness for which we still endeavor. They are saints.

As I mentioned, the extra week was helpful for me in thinking about All Saints, for Friday was filled with funerals. Funerals are obviously connected with

All Saints' day, for one must pass through death to enter into life. The petitions from our Lutheran funeral rite are being used in our prayer of the church this All Saints' day.

The first funeral I want to mention is that of General Colin Powell, who was laid to rest on Friday afternoon with a funeral at the National Cathedral in Washington D.C. The connections to All Saints were many. "Grant him an entrance into the land of light and joy in the fellowship of Thy saints," they prayed — into the Church Triumphant, into the communion of saints. One of the readings was from Revelation 7 as we read here at Zion today. Different people spoke of the many ways General Powell did great things and will be remembered. But with familiar words the preacher named him among "all those who rejoice with us, but upon another shore and in a greater light, that multitude which no man can number," not because of those great and memorable deeds, but because his "hope was in the Word made flesh." We "for evermore are one" with him because he was faithful to Christ. Our Zion saints are numbered with him in that innumerable throng.

But before I watched that funeral, I attended another one, nearer to home. We've have been praying for our brother in Christ John Weber for some time. He had gotten cancer, and recovered from that. But he then caught the COVID virus; and from that he never recovered, but was taken to be with his Lord.

Pastor Blodgett did a good job of preaching Christ, the resurrection and the life, and our Christian hope in the resurrection through faith in Christ Jesus. That's important for us to remember on this All Saints' Day. We are glad that our loved ones "*hunger no more, neither thirst anymore.*" We're glad that "*scorching heat*" no longer troubles them, and that "*God [wipes] away every tear from their eyes.*" Being with Jesus is wonderful — gathered around His throne with the multitude of saints and angels, crying out, "*Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb,*" and worshipping God, singing, "*Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.*" But our Christian hope is more than that. Our hope is in that "yet more glorious day" of resurrection and life, when the "saints triumphant rise in bright array." So, well done, Pastor Blodgett.

To be sure, he assured us that John was with Christ even now. He, too, is among that great multitude of saints gathered around the Lamb. But he also reminded us that passing through death to be with Christ means that one must be in Christ in the here and now, baptized into Christ Jesus, being born of God and made His son through faith. So John was; so we are; so Callahan is now, having been begotten from above in the waters of Holy Baptism, sins washed away, united with

Christ in His body, the Church.

And there's the All Saints connection. The Feast of All Saints is a festival remembering and rejoicing in the Church, the communion of saints — saints like John Weber and our Zion saints in the Church Triumphant in heaven, awaiting the great and glorious day of Christ's return when their dusty bodies will rise victorious over death and the grave; and saints like Callahan who was by Holy Baptism enlisted today with all of us in the Church Militant, fighting still as "soldiers, faithful, true and bold," fighting still in "the well-fought fight."

This is the Church. Rest has come to some "faithful warriors." They have come "*out of the great tribulation*" and reside now in "the calm of paradise the blest." They are in the Church Triumphant. We rejoice for them and with them. We give thanks to God for them. We are strengthened in our faith by their own endurance in the same. We are encouraged to imitate them in faith and good works (Apology XXI:4-6).

On the other hand, we warriors who remain in the Church Militant struggle on, often even feebly. The fight is not over for us; "the fight is [often] fierce, the warfare long." But we do not lose heart, for the outcome is assured. The victor's crown of gold awaits us. It awaits Callahan who is just taking up the sword having been arrayed for battle; and it awaits us who have been in the fight a long time. May the Lord keep our hearts brave and our arms strong to fight the good fight of faith to the end.

Which is why Feast days like All Saints are important; indeed every Divine Service, for here "the distant triumph song" "steals on the ear" and we are encouraged for the battle. But these provide even more support for the fight, for the Divine Service is not only the enlistment center (think baptism), but here also is the field hospital where our wounds are bandaged up and the Gospel balm is soothed on them (think forgiveness of sins), and here also is the chow hall for hungry soldiers (think Word and Supper). Here, feasting on these, we are strengthened for the fight. Here we are encouraged by Christ and by "angels and archangels and all the company of heaven," that "blest communion, fellowship divine" that gathers with us every Lord's Day. Here Church militant and Church triumphant gather together as one, for Christ is here with His body, the Church.

Thus, we pray: Lord, be with us now; keep us faithful to the end, and give us with all Your saints the crown of everlasting life.

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