

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Last Sunday, we celebrated the Reformation. It was a festival of the Holy Spirit, with the altar furnishings adorned in Red, the color of Pentecost; it was a festival of the word. This Sunday, we celebrate the Feast of All Saints, and although neither does it mark a specific event in the life of Christ, nevertheless, it is still a festival of Christ as the color bears witness. White is the color of Christmas and incarnation; it's the color of the visit of the Wise men and Jesus' baptism, it's the color of the Easter season, and so, of resurrection.

All Saints' Day is a festival of Christ — of the mystical body of Christ — as we heard in the collect for the feast. But that makes it also a festival of the Church, the church militant and the church triumphant, for the “Almighty and everlasting God [has] knit together [His] faithful people of all times and places into one holy communion, the mystical body of [His] Son, Jesus Christ” (collect). St. Paul says: “*Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior*” (Eph. 5:23). Truly, this “holy communion” is “the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints” as we confessed today in the Apostles' Creed. Or as we confess in the Augsburg Confession: “Strictly speaking, the Church is the congregation of saints and true believers” (VIII:1).

So Church equals the congregation of saints equals true believers (of all times and places) equals the mystical body of Christ. Luther said it this way: “Thank God, <today> a seven-year-old child knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd [John 10:11–16]” (Smalcald Articles, The Third Part, Article XII:2).

And what faith could be stronger, what faith could be purer, than that which was worked by the Holy Spirit today in Gideon Paul, as water filled with Gospel power poured over his head? Here at this font was Gideon “sundered from the number of the unbelieving, preserved dry and secure in the holy ark of Christendom.” Here was he buried with Christ in death and raised with Christ through faith (Col. 2:12). Here was he clothed with Christ's righteousness (Gal. 3:27). Here was he united with Christ and all the faithful in the Christ's holy body (1 Cor. 12:12-13). Here was Gideon born from above into the kingdom of God, born of God Himself, made God's own child (John 3:3, 5; 1 John 2:29–3:1).

“*Let the children come to me,*” Jesus says, “*do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it*” (Mark 10:14-15). This is the narrow door through which we enter the kingdom of God — humble faith, not grandiose works. This is the way the last become first (Luke 13:24-27, 30), as a gift, receiving the kingdom as a child. In this way are we saints even now.

Which is not to denigrate the faithful who have gone before us, that “*great multitude that no one could number*” standing even now “*before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,*” crying out in praise and worship of our great and glorious God. Their example “*[lifts our] drooping hands and [strengthens our] weak knees*” (Heb. 12:12). That’s why we recall “the saints who nobly fought of old” (LSB677:3), names we recognize — St. Peter, St. Mary, mother of our Lord, St. John, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Paul, and faithful others from the pages of Holy Writ. It’s why we remember those who throughout the years endured revilings and persecutions and accusations ... and some even martyrdom. “*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.*”

Here we also name our Zion saints, those who endured to the end of their earthly life this past year, looking to Jesus, trusting in Him who for them scorned the shame of the cross and died, yet rose again from the dead to be seated at God’s right hand. We don’t have a second day — All Soul’s Day — set aside for the “unsung saints” that no chronicles record or lays are sung. The light of their glory is no less bright. These saints like those named saints, righteous by faith in Christ, shine like the sun in God’s kingdom. These saints have joined the rest of the multitude in the heavenly Zion in praise to the Triune God on the throne: “*Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!*”

We often continue to remember these saints throughout the year, thanking God for this great cloud of faithful witnesses. No, we don’t pray for them — they don’t need our prayers (they pray for us—Apology, XXI:9); but we give thanks to God for them too, for their example of courage and service that also strengthens our faith and gives us examples to emulate (XXI:4-7).

But in all our efforts to remember those saints who have departed this life to be with Christ, let us not forget the saints here, the faithful who gather around Christ to hear His word preached purely and His Supper administered rightly according to His Gospel—for this is what their holiness consists of: the Word of God and true faith. Saints are also the great multitude of the faithful still living who, though weary and heavy laden, gather week in and week out around Christ and are relieved of the burden of sin that weighs them down. They come to Christ to be guided to springs of living water—Christ is this spring. They come to drink of the river of living water that flows from His heart (John 7:38). They come to have their tears wiped from their eyes assured that their loved ones who fell asleep in Him will rise again, and so shall they.

The saints come to be reminded that though they are God’s children now, there is yet more awaiting them: “*what [they] will be has not yet appeared.*” The

saints know that they have been clothed with Christ by holy baptism, and yet they know that sin still assails them. And so they desire, even groan, for “*what lies ahead*” (Phil. 3:13), not that they might “*be unclothed,*” but that they might be “*further clothed*” with glory, “*so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life*” (2 Cor. 5:4). The saints look forward to the day when Jesus shall appear, for then they “*shall be like him, because [they] shall see him as he is.*” As St. Paul says, “*When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory*” (Col. 3:4).

This is the Church; these are the saints. They are believers in Christ, “*God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved*” (Col. 3:12). They are the great saints of old, that great cloud of faithful witnesses; they are the saints we name today, our loved ones set before our eyes as stalwart examples of the faith; they are those like Gideon just clothed for the well fought fight; they are those who like Bryce and Doris have battled long and hard in the fight. They are brothers and sisters “*from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages.*” They are we who are gathered here today, not extolling our wealth or status, not extolling imagined meritorious works, not extolling surplices, tonsures, albs or ceremonies, but extolling Christ, the Lamb slain for us, our Shepherd—His word, His washing, His supper—and giving thanks to God for knitting us into this great multitude, this holy communion, this mystical body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord keep us steadfast in this faith and word unto death, and give us the crown of everlasting life.

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