

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

To speak about the saints is to speak about the church.

Maybe that's self-evident to you, but it's not the first thing that I usually think about on All Saints Day. My thoughts go immediately to those saints from Zion who joined the "*great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, 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!'*"

The saints I think about right away are not those whom the pope has named saint. These Zion saints may not have won great renown, like Peter or Thomas or Paul, with their saintly acts written down for generations to read. On the other hand, those saints actually lived far from the fairy tale holy lives that we think the great saints must have lived: Peter denied Christ, Thomas was mired in unbelief, Paul persecuted Christ. In fact, if you have to live a perfect life to be called a saint, who would be saints? Only the holy angels? Certainly not the recently canonized saint like Junipero Serra, the California missionary called a monster by Native Americans for his mistreatment of them.

No, the picture we have before us in the Revelation to St. John is not some small set of declared saints. What we see is a picture of the church triumphant. In fact, it's easy to make the All Saints connection with church triumphant. This is the church of which we sing today "*with all the saints in glory.*" This is the church of which sing, the church triumphant, filled with "*all the saints who from their labors rest, Who ... by faith before the world confessed [Jesus'] name,*" who are now *forever blest.*" We sing of the church triumphant with glowing words and yearning hearts.

But Feast of All Saints is not just about the church in heaven, either. It also encompasses the church below, here on earth. Indeed, this is what we confess the church is: "*The Church is the congregation of **saints** in which the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered.*" We say the church is holy — not "*holier than thou*" as Christians are sometimes accused of thinking, as if our own holiness was something to brag about, as if our personal holiness counted as anything before God. Isaiah reminds us that even our righteous deeds are as "*a polluted garment.*"

Therefore, the church is filled with sinners, but they are sinners reckoned holy for the sake of the shed holy, precious blood of Christ, and His innocent suffering and death. We are reckoned holy as we don the white robes, washed in the blood of the Lamb. These robes we wear are the robe of Christ's righteousness put on us in holy Baptism—there's our holiness. They are robes washed in the blood that

poured forth from the Lamb's hands and feet and side on Calvary, the Lamb's blood that takes away sins. Baptised into Christ, dying with Him and being raised with Him, sinners become saints who wear not their own holiness, but Christ's holiness. Reborn by Holy Baptism into Christ, people, who were sundered from the kingdom of God by their sins and trespasses, become children of God, born of His will, made alive by His grace.

After this sermon we shall recite a short list of saints, those saints of Zion who have been called to glory in this past year. Listen as those names are read. You will not hear a recounting of their glorious and saintly deeds. You will hear of God's glorious work in them through Christ—giving them rebirth into Christ, making them alive in Christ forever.

When we speak of the saints we are speaking of the church: the church triumphant in heaven and the church militant on earth. The saints in heaven have been translated from this vale of tears to the bliss of heaven. *"They in glory shine,"* while we still feebly struggle with our sins. For being a sinner is not mutually exclusive from being a saint. In the church on earth, they are one and the same, which is why they must be strengthened for what lies ahead of them by the word of Christ preached to them and by the heavenly meat and drink served them in the Sacrament. For we saints are the Lord's *"soldiers, faithful, true and bold,"* called to *"fight as the saints who nobly fought of old."*

And *"the fight is fierce, the warfare long."* That's why we come together as church, weary and heavy laden, to gather week in and week out around Christ and be relieved of the burden of sin that weighs us down. We come to have Christ's holiness bestowed on us again in the forgiveness of our sins. We come to be sheltered with His presence. We come to hear the voice of Him who is both Lamb and Shepherd and follow after Him. We come to be guided to the living waters that flow forth from His heart. We come to have our tears wiped from our eyes.

And as we gather together as church around the Lamb, it is appropriate also to remember the saints of old, to give thanks to God for them, for their example of faith, for their bringing us up in *"the discipline and instruction of the Lord,"* for their works of mercy. We're encouraged to imitate them in faith and good works. We remember them, but we do not cry out to them for aid or comfort for that would be taking the glory and honor away that belongs to Christ alone for He is our advocate; He is our mediator; our help comes from the Lord.

We're strengthened in our faith as we gather as church and remember the saints. We remember that these saints were sinners, too, forgiven by the blood of Jesus. Peter's denial was forgiven—now accounted saint. Thomas' doubts were forgiven—now accounted saint. Paul's persecutions were forgiven—now accounted saint. So are your sins forgiven through Christ, and you are accounted

saint.

Remembering the saints in glory, we are reminded that though we are God's children now, there is yet more awaiting us: "*what we will be has not yet appeared.*" We come to be encouraged in our desire, even with groaning, to be "*further clothed*" with glory, "*so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.*" We come to be built up in the faith that we may look forward to the day when Jesus shall appear, for then we "*shall be like him, because we 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.*"

So here we are today, the church, the communion of saints, gathered here, and not we alone, but with Christ Himself with us, along with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. Here we are gathered around Christ, not touting our wealth or status, not touting imagined meritorious works, not touting surplices, tonsures, albs or ceremonies. We are here as the church, proclaiming the Lamb slain for us, our Shepherd leading us, "*crying out with a loud voice, [saying] 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'*" We're here as sinners made saints by His grace: His word, His washing, His supper. We're here today having been knit together in the mystical body of our Lord Jesus Christ, our sainthood hidden from anyone who does not see with the eyes of faith, but our sainthood very real. We're here as one segment of the great multitude being built up by that "*distant triumph song*" that "*we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us*" and that "*neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

The Lord keep us steadfast in this faith 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. Amen.