

In the name of ✠ Jesus. Amen.

Today we are celebrating All Saints' Day, although I'm sure you know that the actual feast day is November 1st. And even for us Lutherans, made fun of by the likes of Garrison Keillor because of our humility, this day is a day to revel in a bit of triumphalism. It makes sense. We are thinking on the Church Triumphant. We sing of the "cloud of witnesses that surround us," of the "saints of old [who] received God's commendation," of a "glory, far exceeding all that eye has yet perceived."

Today we are looking with anticipation to the "not yet," to "*what we will be*" "*when He appears,*" the "*glory to be revealed to us*" (Rom. 8:13). We rejoice that even now we have been made children of God, children welcomed by Jesus, brought in by the rebirth effected in the Spirit-filled waters of Holy Baptism, wrapped up by baptism in the swaddling cloths of Christ's righteousness. Triumphalism? You bet! "*Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,*" and "*he was raised on the third day*"—that's His victory over death and the grave. And "*thanks be to God, [He] gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

But three Zion saints called to glory in the last three weeks gives one pause to think about the Church Triumphant and our own triumph, and what our texts remind us of as we live our lives in the "now but not yet" of our victory, for although we are saints now, accounted so by faith in Christ Jesus, the saints in glory have "that for which we still endeavor." We are in the Church Militant; in this world we are still "soldiers, faithful, true and bold," and a battle rages on; "the fight is fierce, the warfare long." We fight the fight; we run the race. Ignoring the obstacles that we experience as we run our Christian race does not make them disappear; we simply trip over them. Denying our trials and tribulations does help us to "*run with endurance the race that is set before us*" (Heb.12:1).

How does one finish the race when you've strived for 102 years, and the finish line is not yet in sight, when your body gives out and you can't even pick up your feet?

Did you see the story about the runners at the ACC Cross Country championships this year? It was inspiring! When a Boston College runner literally collapsed on the course and could not pick up her legs to move herself another inch, two of her competitors stopped and helped her, dragged her across the finish line.

What a metaphor for our Christian life! From whence does your help come as you run the race? Your help comes from the Lord (Ps. 121:1-2). He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion (Phil 1:6); He is the founder and

perfecter of your faith (Heb. 12:2)—He will carry you over the finish line, that you might finish the race, keeping the faith (2 Tim. 4:7).

How does one fight the good fight of the faith when, Job-like, you've buried three sons before you and two husbands? Why not just throw in the towel and say, "¡No más! I give up!" Because that doesn't get you the victory. Rather, you say with the psalmist, "*Contend, O Lord, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me!*" (Ps. 35:1). That is, you call upon God to fight for you. And you pray, "*In you, O LORD, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me! ... For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me; ... Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God*" (Ps. 31). And you make it to round 15; with the Lord fighting for you, watching over you, protecting you, you can say, "*I've fought the good fight ... I have kept the faith*" (2 Tim. 4:7).

For yes, the life of the Christian is filled with tribulations... "*the great tribulation*" that will precede Christ's return? Perhaps not, but tribulations nonetheless, for St. Paul taught that it's only "*through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.*" And reminding his hearers of the trials to come, he was steeling them, "*strengthening the souls of the disciples—believers—encouraging them to continue in the faith*" (Acts 14:22).

For why should our faith be tested any less than the church at Smyrna? Otherwise, how could these words apply to us: "*Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life*" (Rev. 2:10).

Expect tribulation in this world of sin, O Christian saints. Hunger and thirst for some. Scorching heat for others. Humble and meek, ridiculed, reviled, persecuted—yet we are blessed. Worried, hurting, grieving, but not as others do who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13). As St. Paul says of us: "*We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you*" (2 Cor. 4:8-12).

For, yes, we know this mortal life ends with death. But death is not the end for the believer, and truly we know that those who believe in Jesus never die. For "*since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep*" (1 Thess. 4:14)—who have died keeping "*the faith.*" And in this hope we will have come "*out of [our] tribulation*" still believing. We will "*have washed [our] robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*"

Saints Now Fighting and Running to Our Victory in the Church Triumphant

Revelation 7:2-17; 1 John 3:1-3

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The Feast of All Saints

Pastor Douglas Punke

And we shall be like Him, raised in glory. We who are dead, shall *“be raised imperishable.”* Our *“mortal body [will have] put on immortality.”* We shall sit *“before the throne of God”* in the shelter of *“his presence.”* For the fullness of Christ’s victory over death will be ours, and we will join in the victor’s taunt: *“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”*

But more importantly, we will join with the *“great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages.”* We will join in the everlasting song, singing, *“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”* And we will worship God, saying, *“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”*

God grant to us, His saints in the Church militant, the faithfulness, *“through toil and tribulation and tumult of her war, to [await] this consummation of peace forevermore Till with the vision glorious Her longing eyes are blest, And the great Church victorious Shall be the Church at rest.”*

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