

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

White is on the altar, clueing you in to the fact that this is a festival Sunday. In fact, white is the color of Christ festivals and seasons: Christmas, Epiphany, the Baptism of Jesus, the Transfiguration of our Lord, Easter. But today is the Festival of All Saints...a Christ festival? Indeed it is.

The big clue came in the collect of the day: “Almighty and everlasting God, You knit together Your faithful people of all times and places into one holy communion, **the mystical body of Your Son, Jesus Christ.**” Today is a Christ festival because we are talking about Christ’s body, the Church. That’s how Scripture speaks of the Church. St. Paul says, “*And [God the Father] put all things under [Christ’s] feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, **which is his body**, the fullness of him who fills all in all*” (Eph. 1:22-23). Again, “*Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ... we are members of his body*” (Eph. 5:23, 30). And again, “*[Christ] is the head of the body, the church*” (Col. 1:18).

In particular, this day is a celebration of the unity we have in Christ Jesus — in His body. “God ... knit together ... faithful people ... into **one holy communion**,” as we confess, “I believe in one, holy, Christian and apostolic church.” Christians everywhere have been joined together into the one body of Christ by the Spirit working through Holy Baptism. St. Paul reminds us of this oneness in Christ Jesus: “*There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all*” (Eph. 4:4-6). Having been “*baptized into Christ*,” Paul says, “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Gal. 3:27-28).

To be sure, this unity is not always apparent in the world. That’s not surprising, is it? The church is filled with sinners. Sinners sin. Sinners often fail to “*walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which [they] have been called*” (Eph. 4:1). Sinners are often filled with pride rather than humility. Sinners can often be harsh and unkind rather than gentle. Sinners can be short-tempered rather than patient, uncaring rather than loving. Sinners are often eager to break “*the unity of the Spirit*” rather than maintain it “*in the bond of peace*” (Eph. 4:2-3). Repent!

Consider your lives according to the Ten Commandments, you fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, husbands, wives, or workers! Repent of your disobedience, your unfaithfulness, your laziness. Repent when you’ve become hot-tempered, been rude or quarrelsome. Repent of your hurtful words and deeds. Repent of your thefts, your negligence, your wastefulness. Repent, and be forgiven in Christ

Jesus, who by His blood atoned for these sins, who by giving Himself for you, sanctified you, cleansed you, removed every spot and wrinkle, who in the waters of holy baptism washed you and clothed you with the white robe of His righteousness that you might be reckoned righteous, *“holy and without blemish”* (Eph. 5:27), that you who trust in Him might be reckoned saints!

Indeed, that’s how we began this service: with a hymn addressed to you saints, not the saints in heaven, but the saints on earth, saints whose righteousness is based on faith, saints who call on the name of the Lord, for we know that *“everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”* (Rom. 10:13). The hymn addressed you as saints, and yet called you to look beyond this life to the next. “Saints, see the cloud of witnesses surround us; Their lives of faith encourage and astound us” (LSB667).

For this mystical body of Jesus Christ, the one, holy church, is knit together of “faithful people of all times and places.” It consists not just of the church militant here on earth, the faithful who don the full armor of God and defend themselves *“against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”* (Eph. 6:12), who take up arms with the *“the sword of the Spirit ... the word of God”* and pray *“at all times in the Spirit ... making supplication for all the saints”* (Eph. 6:17-18), but also of the church triumphant, the *“great multitude that no one [can] number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,”* disparate people all united around *“the throne”* of God, all standing *“before the Lamb”* worshiping Him together.

But not just disparate people of place; also of time—apostles, prophets, patriarchs and matriarchs, saints of old; Mom or Dad, Grandma or Grandpa, husband or wife, teacher or pastor, supervisor or co-worker, all those who ran the race with endurance, who *“fought the good fight ... [who] kept the faith”* (2 Tim. 4:7), *“looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame”* (Heb. 12:2).

Oh, what great consolation to know that these faithful saints are gathered around the Lamb. Oh, what consolation to know that their troubles are gone, their tears wiped away, that they forever drink of the streams of living water. Oh, what encouragement for us, who struggle still in this valley of sorrow, to follow in their example of faithfulness. We are encouraged because we know that they, like saints around the world, have experienced *“the same kinds of suffering”* (1 Pet. 5:9), and encouraged because as a member of Christ’s body, we share in His sufferings, in His death, and one day we will share also in His resurrection.

And so, O saints, we are blessed; therefore, rejoice and be glad. Our reward will be great, for there is a glory yet to be revealed in us. For Christ will return in glory, our bodies will be raised, and we shall receive a glory like unto His.

Therefore, let us join our voices to the heavenly multitude's in a unified song, singing "*Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.*" And let them join their voices to ours: "Now let us worship our Lord and our King, Joyfully raising our voices to sing: Praise to the Father, and praise to the Son, Praise to the Spirit, to God, Three in One" (LSB675).

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