

From Tribulation to Joy

Revelation 7:1-17

Introduction

Today, we observe the celebration of All Saints' Day. But this raises some questions. First, why do we celebrate the saints? Second, how do we celebrate the saints? Third, who are the saints we celebrate?

The Benefits of Celebrating the Saints

The **Augsburg Confession** gives three reasons we celebrate the saints:

- *First, we thank God for giving faithful servants to His Church.*
- *Second, through such remembrance our faith is strengthened as we see the mercy that God extended to His saints of old.*
- *Third, these saints are examples by which we may imitate both their faith and their holy living according to our calling in life – (AC, Article XXI).*

Notice, in no way and at no time do we worship or pray to the saints. The Bible doesn't command, suggest, or give an example of this being done. We honor them and look up to them. We learn from them, but we do not worship them. This would make them idols.

It's All About Jesus

So, how do we celebrate the saints? Think about it: this is a worship service, but we aren't here to worship the saints. The focus of our worship is always Jesus and the salvation we have in Him. This is what sets Lutheran funerals apart from others. Our funeral services are worship services, which may include Holy Communion. The color is white because these are times of celebration. We do not honor or eulogize the deceased. We celebrate the salvation the deceased has attained in Jesus Christ. When I conduct a funeral, any eulogies are given before the Invocation. From Invocation to the end of the service, the focus is Jesus Christ and the salvation we have in Him. This is how we celebrate the saints, by celebrating the salvation of Jesus Christ that they have attained. (Read **Jeremiah 9:23-24**) Or as Paul says: *Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:31).*

The "Multitude that No One Could Number"

So, who do we celebrate today? Later, we will offer a prayer of thanksgiving for those who have gone before. That might make us think that today is about the *great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1)* of dearly departed saints. But our reading in **Revelation** says it's a *multitude that no one could number* and **1 John 3**, the Epistle reading, talks about what it will be like for us when Christ returns. Today, we celebrate *all* saints, past, present, and future.

The Bliss of the Future

When we think about the saints, our minds are drawn to heaven. What will it be like for us when Jesus returns? First, we won't be doing our favorite hobby, like golf or fishing for eternity. **Verse 15** says: *"They are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple."* We will be worshipping

God continually. Second, we will be there in our resurrected bodies, as God *will shelter* us. Third, all our needs will be met; it's an ideal place. Finally, God *will wipe away every tear* (v. 17). This is the complete and final fulfillment of God's promises.

The Reality of the Now

The reality is the now we live in. We live in a fallen world with tribulation and suffering. Right now we are among the 144,000 from earlier in this chapter. The ones numbered because we are lined up for warfare. We have been sealed with Holy Baptism to see us through the struggles and trials of this life. Sometimes we get tired of the struggle. We may think it's not worth it and give up hope. Then, something like an All Saints' service reminds us that to be part of the church militant means suffering here in a world that is against us and has been for 2,000 years. But it also means that we will be part of the church triumphant when Christ returns. So, how do we get from *Tribulation to Joy*?

From Here to There

The answer to that question is in **verse 14**, "*They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*" What it takes for us to become saints and enter heaven is to be clothed in Christ's righteousness. We are clothed in His righteousness when we wash our robes and make them white in His blood. This cleansing by His blood is given to us at Baptism. He continues to cleanse and prepare us through the Word and Sacrament of the Altar throughout our lives. When He returns, He will take us away and move us from *Tribulation to Joy*!

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
