

The Church Triumphant

Revelation 7:9—17

Introduction

Many times, when preaching a funeral sermon, I will say of the deceased that he or she has been transferred from the Church Militant to the Church Triumphant. While on this earth we are embroiled in a war with the devil and his cohorts, sin and death, we are in the Church Militant. But it's a war we can't lose because Christ has already won it for us. So, when we leave this life and all that is behind us, we will be celebrating the victory we have in Christ. We will be in the Church Triumphant. This is what we celebrate when we observe All Saints' Day. As the name suggests, we are celebrating all the saints, past, present, and future. But it's not merely a celebration of people. It's a celebration of the salvation the saints, including us, have in Jesus Christ.

Lutheran Funerals

This explains why Lutheran funerals are the way they are and why they're so important for the family and friends left behind. Funerals of non-Christians are sad, hollow events with no hope. They sometimes talk about trying to find "closure." The average Christian funeral has hope. There is still crying over the loss of the loved one but usually there is talk about them being "better off" now. They may also include a "celebration of life", where the life of the deceased is remembered with fondness. But the purpose of a Lutheran funeral is to remind us of and refocus us on what really matters. It's a Divine Service, with the focus on the cross and the empty tomb. It's a celebration of the salvation and eternal life we have in Jesus Christ. Let's take a closer look at this multitude in white robes around the throne, the Church Triumphant.

White Robes

White robes are a sign of purity. The saints' robes are white because they have been *washed in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14)*. These robes of righteousness have nothing to do with the acts of the saints or their lives. They are righteous with the righteousness that comes from God that we read about last week in **Romans 3**, and that Paul also talks about in **Philippians 3 (Read Philippians 3:8—9)**. On the cross, Jesus took our sins upon Himself and at our conversion, He clothes us with His righteousness. This is the white robe worn by the saints.

The Great Tribulation

The angel says that they have *come out of the great tribulation (v. 14)*. This is part of the paradox that makes Revelation so hard to understand. In **Revelation 20** we read (read **Revelation 20:1—3**). This is not a literal thousand years but figurative. It stands for the church age. Christ is reigning on the earth through His people, His church. But remember, the kingdom of God is now and not yet. Satan is bound in that he has lost the war on Calvary, but he is still fighting and will be free for a brief time. At the same time as this is the church age, it is an age of warfare for the church, an age of tribulation. Don't believe me? Take a look at the world.

Eternal Worship

In **verse 15**, the angel says, *“Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple.”* When I read this, I always feel sorry for those who call themselves Christians who, for some reason or another, aren’t in church that often. They want to go to heaven when they die, but while they’re here, they don’t really get much out of worship. But that’s what heaven will be all about. I know what many are thinking: *I’m too busy right now. I’ll have time for that when I’m dead.* If you can’t make time for it now, you won’t be very happy when that’s all there is to do.

Comfort

“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat” (v. 16). All our needs will be met. For Christ will be our Shepherd and will take care of us. He cares for us and shepherds us here on this earth but sometimes, we don’t see it. In the Church Triumphant, all will be comfort and bliss.

Contentment

“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (v. 17). Won’t it be great? There will be no reason to cry. We won’t even remember the sorrows and pain of this earth. Yes, we have a lot to look forward to. But what about until then? Until then, God will continue to feed us on His Word and the body and blood of His Son. Two things we have that keep us going amid this troubling world as the Church Militant: 1) the assurance that one day we will be in the Church Triumphant, enjoying all the pleasures of heaven and worshiping God eternally. 2) And the presence of Christ with us through all of life.

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