

Sermon - November 6, 2022 - All Saints' Day – Observed
Pastor Ventura
Faith Lutheran Church

Endurance Till The End

Revelation 7:2–17

Dear friends in Christ,

“For All the Saints Who from Their Labors Rest” indeed. Today we do commemorate All Saints, the saints who are in the triumphal church and the saints who are still in the militant church. Now, to speak of the saints in the triumphant church, on all Saints Day, often brings a sweet and truly joyful tear to my eye as we remember loved ones who've gone to heaven before us. But they are now before the throne of God! As our first reading reminds us, and which is today bases for our meditation.

No, we are not remembering well-known or hero saints, but rather our own saints, the ones we personally know and remember. And in a moment, we are going to hear their names. Many congregations will remember the ones who died in the last year, but we here at Faith we go back ten years, to keeping giving thanks to God often. So, for us All Saints Day is not just a day of encouragement it is also a day of thankful grieving.

The encouragement we get from the departed Saints, is their faithfulness, especially of the ones who overcome great tribulation. That despite the difficulties they faced whatever that was, they remained faithful to what they believed and confessed, and to their callings in their personal vocation and in the service of others, in the church and their community. And above all “they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” And they stand in God’s presence “clothed in white.” Revelation 7 tells us: “Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. ¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

What a vision of Heaven! And who wouldn't want to be there? Imagine this: there will be no more hunger no more or thirst, no sunburn or scorching heat! No more tears, the opposite is true, they will always drink from the springs of living water!

I'm not sure about you, but I'm looking forward to Heaven, and meet those have gone before us, for they are already experiencing the exhilarating experience of being in God's presence. They have won the battle; they have achieved their goal. They endured till the end. And if we desire to see them in Heaven and be before the Throne of the Lamb too, then learning to emulate their endurance and faithfulness is the lessons we need to learn. Jesus said it so: "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." (Rev. 2:10)

Endurance and faithfulness are needed to overcome tribulation here on this side of eternity where life is but pain and sin runs rampant even in the midst of God's people.

Pain and sin running rampant is what our text this morning describes as tribulation, but it is getting worse. Still to come is the great tribulation and not many will be able to withstand it. But until then each one of us will have its own tribulation to go through, terminal illness, economic and family problems, persecution because of our faith, and so on. Those things indeed require that the Saints that are left behind, the ones who are part of the militant Church, you and I be faithful. Faithfulness is necessary to overcome! That's why God enables us through the power of His Spirit to have and produce faith, as Paul teaches in Galatians 5:22-23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

Faithfulness in our contemporary English language means: "strict or thorough in the performance of duty" "true to one's word, promises, vows, etc." "steady in allegiance or affection; loyal; constant" "reliable, trusted, or believed." "adhering or true to fact, a standard, or an original; accurate." (from dictionary.reference.com)

So many uses for the word faithfulness, don't you think so? But perhaps we can summarize it this way: "our loyalty and staying true to that which we believe and have made a promise to do so"

This is important because as we see it all over, there is no much faithfulness, not only to God but even the day to day aspects of life.

Paul said it “There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power....” (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

Paul is right in his description, there is such “faithlessness” in God and in relation to one another. So many have fallen into satan’s trap, and have been led to act as Paul says, “lovers of themselves, lovers of money, lovers of pleasure” and get that any way they can. Really, if we think about it, faithfulness is still there, just that the object of that faithfulness as been replaced. Instead of letting God run our lives, we let other things run our lives, and we are faithful to that. So many have fallen also into the trap that satan has set before them, that tribulations are a curse, that God allows pandemics to happen, or wars to exist, then this God, the God that we are professing must be an unjust God, what bother to worship an unjust God. The problem is that they cave into their tribulations, deny God and walk away from him.

Faithfulness involves confession, obedience and renunciation or rejection of other aspects that move us to become disloyal. And yet in many instances we have not rejected or renounced to the things of the world, instead we have become loyal, faithful to them.

We live in a society that preaches that it’s ok to be “lovers of ourselves” “lovers of money” “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” We live in our society that is faithful at making money, thinking that by making lots of money we are loving ourselves, because now we can afford all we want. How ironic it is though! Have you noticed that in this society we live to work when we should be working to live? No wonder so many unhappy and short-tempered people. No wonder so many people think they don’t need God because they have money, and because they have money, they think they can do whatever, even if that includes switching their allegiances. A man leaves his wife’s love thinking that with money he can buy love somewhere else. Young people think God is to boring so they rather spend their time being faithful to their favorite hobbies, and many of them not good hobbies.

Think about it, how can a person be faithful to God when he loves himself more than God? How can a person be faithful to God when his own gratification means more to him than pleasing God? How can a person be faithful if he is a treacherous, conceited slanderer and traitor who is disobedient to parents, greedy, unloving and without self-control?

John tells us in his first letter 1 John chapter 5: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides for ever.”

“But whoever does the will of God abides for ever!” Those who remain faithful will stand one day in front of God’s throne of glory in Heaven. Faithfulness will make our lives fruitful on this side of eternity as well. Faithfulness to God will keep us standing strong in the face of tribulations, in the face of hardship, in the face of Satan Himself, and all his schemes to lead us to betray your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

So remain faithful, endure till the end, as you do, think of how the apostle Paul instructs us saying: “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ... ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained. ¹⁷ Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many, ... walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.” (Phil. 3:12-21)

Yes! today we remember those who have gone before us, they have completed their course. We are so thankful that God has taken them to his throne, to his presence. And we learn from their endurance till the end. We learn from their

faithfulness. They held God and His way with the utmost importance. And now, they are awaiting those of us traveling the path now to join them. We pray then that the Lord of all Faithfulness will keep us faithful! Give us the courage and most importantly the Holy Spirit to produce faithfulness in us.

Will you stand? Well that depends on what we do with the Blood of the Lamb! The Angel told John in his vision that the Saint he was seen were those who: “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Ah the blood of the Lamb! The blood of Christ, shed on the Cross of Calvary is what washes away our sin, our guilt of our unfaithfulness. It is difficult to remain faithful with a guilty conscience. It is difficult to remain faithful to what we believe teach and confess, it is difficult to remain faithful to one another in the faith, and to our spouses, or our children, or our parents with a guilty conscience. It is difficult to remain faithful unless we are made clean and sustained by the one who is truly faithful.

He is truly faithful and I’m glad He is because I need Him, we need Him. We need his forgiveness; we need him to forgive our unfaithfulness. We need to renew a right spirit within us as He promised He will do through the forgiveness of our sins.

He died for us who couldn’t be loyal to the Father Creator by obediently dying in our place. He shed His blood so that with it He would wash our robes our conscience, so that once cleansed He will make us loyal to the Father, and our loyalties with one another, and our commitments with one another will remain strong, good, and beneficial.

His faithfulness stands, he confirms it continually as he did for those who are in Heaven, he confirms it for us here, through the forgiveness of our sins, the word and gifts of the Altar, there he tells us, I’m here, I’m faithful, you are mine!

In His name, amen.

And “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.” (1 Thess. 5:23-24)