

Beloved Children...Right Now

When things are good, it's very easy to *live in the moment*. In fact, when things are *really* good with us, we often tend to forget about both the past and the future, so caught up are we in the present. *We don't want the goodness to end*. Yet, when life does take that inevitable turn south, thoughts of past and future come flooding in. We lament "the good old days." We dream about better days to come. We try to *cover over and drive away* the present sufferings by looking elsewhere; looking to the past and/or to the future. Understand: This isn't *necessarily* a bad thing. This can be very good; very healthy; very preservative. After all, it can be very easy to get overwhelmed by all the pain and suffering that's a part of everyday life in this fallen and sinful world of ours. Without that *therapeutic* vision backwards and forwards, one could easily be consumed by the pain of the present. Depression sets in. Hope becomes fleeting, if not lost all together. Our drive, our desire to keep pushing forward can die. Even faith can fall victim to present sufferings and tribulations. *It happens all the time*.

It is because of this ever-present danger that St. John wrote letters to Christians under his care who were experiencing the *trials, tribulations, and sufferings* of being a faithful Christian in a very unfaithful and dark world. In fact, John begins his first letter by immediately taking the people back "to that which was from the beginning." Then he goes on to say that he writes these things to the people so that they too can believe and have fellowship with him and the rest of the Christians; fellowship that will make faithful joy complete and fulfilled.

Think about that. Within the first four verses, John immediately lifts the people out of their *present suffering* by focusing their faith on the *past reality and the future joy*. Chapter three is no different. He begins by talking about the love the Father has already given us; love that made us His children. He also points the hearer to the future joy of the resurrection, when we will arise and be with Christ. Yet, in the midst of this John *also* directs the people to the present. "*Beloved, we are God's children now.*"

Now, before we go on, it is important to understand what John is not saying here in directing the people to the present. He's *not* simply telling them to "count their blessings," as if *things could be worse*. How often these dreadful words come out of our mouths. We may say these words with the best intentions, but they still come across as cold and unloving.

So...if John is not telling the people to stop whining and remember to count their blessings, then why does he direct their attention to the present? Why does he

draw them back into the midst of their suffering? My friends: Is Jesus Christ *only* a past-tense reality? Does the joy of Christ *only* reside in the unforeseen future? ***Absolutely not!*** As baptized children of God, we have a *present-tense* joy and peace that surpasses all human understanding. How often we forget that. When trouble arises, how often we go into “default mode” and lament the “good old days.” How often we imagine and long for better days to come. ***How often we fail to recognize the joy and truth of Immanuel in our present lives; in our very midst.***

My fellow redeemed: This is why this specific text is appointed to be the Epistle lesson for All Saints Sunday *every single year*. It never ceases to amaze me how many people think of saints *only* in terms of dead and faithfully departed. We may use the term from time to time to refer to a kind and virtuous person (e.g., “*so-and-so has the patience of a saint*”), yet we often turn right around and refer to that same person *as no saint at all* when their sin comes to light for all to see. I guess that’s our way of *defending/justifying* the sinner (and the sin). “*Well, you know, he’s no saint.*” **No one ever says that about people they don’t like.** But people we do like? Ourselves? Well...that’s different. “*We’re no saints. We’re certainly not damned sinners like those fools we don’t like, but we’re no saints either.*” Based on our everyday usage of the word, you can’t help but come to the conclusion that saints are people who’ve died and gone to heaven and no longer have to worry about sin. Those of us residing on this side of eternity may possess and exhibit certain *saint-like virtues* from time to time, but in the end, we’re not saints. That only happens once we get to heaven and join the communion of the saints, right?

Wrong! This is why we meditate on this text this morning. As baptized and redeemed children of God, we, too, are saints *right now!* It’s not a future-tense thing. Through faith in God’s grace alone because of Christ alone, we have the ever-present joy and peace of knowing that we have been *declared “holy”* in God’s eyes. That’s what it means to be a saint. That’s what the Greek word *hagios* means: “*holy one.*” That’s what it means to be justified through faith alone in God’s grace alone because of Christ alone. God declares us to be *innocent and holy and righteous saints*, not because we’ve earned it with good and saintly behavior, but because Christ Jesus earned it for us in His death and resurrection.

When you get down to it, that’s really what All Saints Day is about. It’s about Jesus Christ and our kinship to Him, *because of Him*. That’s why the All Saints Day Gospel lesson is *always* the Beatitudes. All these Beatitudes—these promises of blessing—are about Christ **first** and then about the reality of *our sainthood in Christ*. Contrary to what the world believes, the Beatitudes are not

“Be-Attitudes” that we need to strive for and check off so that we can acquire blessings from God. These are descriptions and conditions of our Savior, *which only become our present-tense realities through our being in-grafted into Him.* This is why He says, “*Blessed are those (present tense) who are persecuted for my sake.*” People are not attacked by the devil, world and flesh for “being good,” but for having a righteousness that is not their own. *They are attacked because they cleave to Christ’s righteousness alone.* Are you hearing proper keeping of the First Commandment here (to fear, love, and trust in God above all things)? The fallen, sinful world and its evil prince cannot stand those who trust in Christ *alone and above all things.* Believe it! **If you are in Christ, then the world will hate you. The devil will target you, and your sinful flesh will give you no rest.** “*Have you done enough? Is there more you still need to do?*” This is why John wrote to those early Christians. This is why he writes to us today. This is why we flee here to the Divine Service; to be with Immanuel, to hear God’s Word, to receive absolution for our sins, to eat and drink His body and blood for life and forgiveness, and to be strengthened to live fearlessly and faithfully in our Baptismal reality. We flee here to receive Christ; a foretaste of the feast to come; a feast that all the faithful who have gone on before us are enjoying *right now* at that half of Lord’s Table that’s *in heaven in all its fullness and splendor and glory.*

Think about that when you come up here to the Lord’s Table to be fed and nourished *by Him with His very body and blood.* You come to this half of the table; the half that feeds the Church Militant. The rest of the communion of saints; the angels, the archangels, and all the company of heaven is gathered around in faithful worship at the heavenly half of the Lord’s Table, communing with their Lord and Savior *at the same exact time,* transcending time and space. Kind of puts this in a different light, doesn’t it? I hope so.

As saints in this life, we hold forth Christ as the One who calls us saints and who goes with us as we walk through this fallen and sinful world *by faith and not by sight,* carrying our crosses and suffering along the way. However, in the life to come, we know that we too shall see Him as He is, for we will be like Him and we shall live forever in His paradise without fear, darkness, shame, sin, death, pain, suffering or tears. This reality is—right now—the joy of the saints who have gone before us. This same reality, my friends, is the hope and sure and certain future of all who walk this earth and are—right now. *This is the sure and certain blessed reality of all who are called saints in Christ.*

*A Blessed and Joyous All Saints Day to you, my fellow saints in Christ!
Amen.*