

Intro.: Today, we observe All Saint's Day, which is a little different from other saint's days that may focus on one or two individuals. So, who are we really commemorating today? With the elder from John's Revelation we ask, "Who are these?... **Who Are All The Saints?"**

I. The Few That The Church Says Have Earned It?

A. Many people, when they hear the term "saints" think it pertains only to a very few who lived an exemplary life of faith and who did extraordinary works, even miraculous things during their earthly lives. They are thinking of those who have been canonized by Rome as ones so holy that they have merited a superabundance of grace from God. They are thought to have earned so much of God's favor that they can transfer some of it to others.

B. The process of canonization has come a long way since the Early Church so that it now follows very specific rules. First, the person has to be dead for at least five years. That counts all of you out, okay! Then, after that, the bishop can begin an investigation to see just how virtuous the person was. If the investigation is favorable, documents are turned over to Rome, where, after further a vote is taken on whether to move forward with the process. Finally, there must be at least one miracle performed by that person while they were alive and one attributed to them after death. So, it takes quite a bit to become a saint according to Rome. In fact, you cannot even stop working at it even after you die.

C. Anyone who studies the life of some of the people who bear the title of saint will discover that while many of these people had extraordinary faith and lives, they were still flesh and blood people who were sinners like us. We Lutherans, look to the saints as models of faith and Christian living, but we are very careful not to ascribe more to them than we should. None of them merited God's grace nor earned so much of God's favor that they have extra to share with us. The faith they had and the lives they lived were all because of God's grace and undeserved favor. The only thing they can share with us - and thank God for this - is their example.

II. There Is, In Fact, Only One Has Earned The Title of "Saint or Holy One".

A. And that One is God's Son in the flesh, Christ Jesus. In our Gospel you heard the Beatitudes. Many teach that they are rules for how you should live as a Christian so that you may be rewarded - if you live like this then God will give you something else. Some even teach that if you try hard enough you can actually live up to them, but that makes them into nothing but a new law that condemns and takes away all hope of God's grace and favor. Read properly, they are actually wonderful words of Gospel because they describe first of all the Holy One of God, Jesus and secondly all those who are united with Him by faith.

B. Listen to them: "Blessed is the poor in spirit..." Who is poor in spirit and soul like those who are united with the One, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God as thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant...And being found in human form, humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Phil. 2:6-8) He is the One, who for us and our salvation, cried out in poverty of spirit, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46)

They say, "Blessed are those who mourn..." Who has mourned like the soul that is united with the One who mourned, not over his own troubles but over the unbelief of his people? Christ came to comfort his people as their Savior, but he was, in the words of Isaiah, "Despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." (Is. 53:3); he grieved over them saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (Mt.23:37)

"Blessed are the meek..." say the beatitudes. And who is meek like the soul that is made one with the King who entered Jerusalem, "Humble and riding on a donkey..." (Zech. 9:9)? The One who said of Himself, "I am gentle and lowly in heart, and [in me] you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:29) He is the One who earned that rest by remaining silent before His accusers and executioners.

"Blessed are the merciful.." Who has been merciful like those who are incorporated into the One was so dedicated to mercy that He was willing to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful high priest?

[nt. Heb. 2:17] He healed and forgave those who called upon Him in faith, even from the cross he cried out in mercy, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Lk. 23:34)

"Blessed are the pure in heart..." Who has been pure in heart like the soul that finds itself in Him who was so pure that even when tempted like us in every way, He remained without sin? [Nt. Heb. 4:15] Out of love for us He even allowed His sinless self to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God?

"Blessed are the peacemakers" Who has made peace like those who are united with the One mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ, who made peace, as Paul writes, "He himself is our peace, ...through the cross..." (Eph. 2:14)

And what about "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake..." Who has endured persecution like those who by faith are in Christ - the One who was perfectly righteous yet condemned and crucified? Because He was righteous, He was and is always hated by the world and a target of its threats and accusations.

C. All the blessings of the beatitudes belong to Christ and by extension also to those who are united with Him by faith. They are not if then statements of condemning law, but both and statements of sweet Gospel. Even though you suffer with Christ, you also share in His glory. To the believer in Christ belongs the kingdom of heaven, the comfort of salvation, the inheritance of the earth, the fullness of righteousness, the mercy of the Father, the right to see God, and the right to be called His child. Great is the reward in heaven for every person who has been united with the Holy One of God who is "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact icon of His nature... [who] after making purification for sins,..sat down at the right hand of Majesty on high." (Heb. 1:3) It is true, not just a few, but only One is truly holy. Only One, has merited a superabundance of grace and earned a favor with God that can be completely transferred to others through faith. And that is what He has done for the faithful departed and what He is doing for all of us right here, today.

III. Now, Many Have Received The Title of Saint By Faith.

A. Christ, the only true Holy One of God, has proven Himself by what He has done. And now, despite what we have done or failed to do, He declares us holy and blameless in His sight. He gives us a righteousness, a holiness, that is not of our doing, but His. He gives us all the blessings he has earned for us as a free gift. By grace through faith, He has made us all saints and holy ones of God.

B. We have a description of what it really means to be a saint in answer to the question that is asked by the elder in Revelation. Look at how they are described. First, there are not only a few saints, but lots and lots of them -"a great multitude that no one could number from every nation, tribe, people and language." Second, we are told why they are saints. It is because they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. The blood of Jesus has removed all their sins through washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit in baptism. They have been clothed with Christ's own robe of righteousness and holiness. Dressed in that clean, white robe they dwell in the presence of Christ, who gives them eternal blessings and perfect peace. They are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation. They have received victory over sin, death and the devil and so wave their palm branches in the triumphant parade.

C. This is not only a picture of heaven or of some future glory that we will have. It is a picture of us, right here and right now. It is the Holy Christian Church where our sins are daily and richly forgiven, where we are enlightened with eternal gifts, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit through our worship in Word and Sacrament. It is happening here as we gather before the throne of God and of the Lamb. You may not feel like a saint yet, but you are! By grace and through faith you are the holy ones of God!

Concl.: So, who are all the saints? I am glad to say that I have known and still know many of them personally. I am looking at the places where many of them used to sit. I am in the house where they continue to join themselves with their fellow saints in worship. I am looking at them right now! What a beautiful vision you are, all of you saints of God! Amen.