

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-12 / Revelation 7: 9-17

***"A Sea of Saints"***

When you hear the word "Saint" – what do you think of? It really all depends on where you come from. People with a Roman Catholic background think of people who have been elevated to a level called canonization – giving them a special place in the church. Other Christian denominations look at saints as faithful believers that are deceased. I would like to suggest to you that I believe saints go far beyond all of that – and to be a believer in Jesus Christ as Lord, and the Son of God is a saint. Look around you today – we are surrounded by saints. You might be saying to yourself – "I am not as saint" – well, yes, you are. But you are also a sinner – but you know who to go to when you feel burdened by sin. You go before the Lord and you ask for forgiveness. Because you know His Son, Her gives you the forgiveness that His Son earned for you.

In our first reading from the Revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Apostle John, John is given a vision of saints in heaven, in God's throne room, worshipping and serving Him day and night with great, abundant, and exuberant joy. This vision is what John 'sees' in verse 9 of chapter 7, after having 'heard' the list of the 144,000 in verses 4–8. He sees a huge crowd of people which nobody could ever count – so please, do not worry about the numbers. It is more than you ever could count – and it keeps growing! Along with this huge crowd of people John also saw the four living creatures, the elders, and the angels. His description of the throne in the center and the expanding circle of those who were praising God is, in my estimation, absolutely awesome. John says that all these saints are from all over the earth—from every tribe and nation and language. It is important to know that the word 'nation' refers to the Gentiles. That means you have a place in heaven – if you know and love Jesus as Lord, then you are a saint – even in the pew at Saint Andrew's.

This sea of 'saints' were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

- White robes are the sign of purity and of Christ's righteousness and holiness.
- The palm branches: a sign of victory and royalty – of the King of Kings – recalling His triumphant entry into the earthly Jerusalem on the Sunday before He was crucified.

The word '*salvation*' in verse 10, means 'to be saved or rescued.' Isn't that the truth! Jesus' death on the cross 'rescues' us from ourselves and our own sins. They are continually praising and worshipping - recognizing with joy that everything good, noble, powerful, and wise can only come from God Himself. It is the uninhibited shout of praise to God from whom all blessings flow.

John, on the Island of Patmos, during this vision, is transported to the heavenly throne room, and this is not just any throne room, it is God's Holy Temple, the heavenly temple, the perfect counterpart to the Temple in Jerusalem. I find it absolutely amazing that John is not simply looking on from a great distance as a fly-on-the-wall, but he is right in the midst of everything, with the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. And one of those elders speaks to John, asking him the questions which we all want to know the answer to – "*who are these*

people?” “Where do they come from?” This elder himself supplies the answer – “*These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*” (Revelation 7:14) This is the answer that the church desperately needs to hear. Yes today – even in the midst of this pandemic! We are fooling ourselves if we do not think that this is some kind of tribulation. The enemy has put it upon us and we cannot move from the fact that Jesus is King, and we look to Him for salvation – to rescue us from this. They have lived through the nightmare and can now wake up to a glorious, fresh new morning. The reason their clothes are white is not because they necessarily lived lives of total holiness and purity, but because of one thing; the blood of the Lamb of God, the sacrificial Passover-like death of Jesus Himself, who has rescued them from slavery to sin, making them to be able to stand in the very presence of the living God, Himself. If you have sin you cannot be in God’s presence; darkness cannot exist in light. You walk into a dark room and turn on the light – what happens – the darkness goes away. Darkness in our hearts cannot live in the presence of God - but when we ask for His forgiveness, that darkness goes away because it is filled with His Light. It is not our righteousness that God sees when we believe in Jesus and we ask Him to be our Lord; it is the righteousness of Christ Himself, through His sacrifice on the cross – through His Blood.

Because of the death of Jesus, and the suffering that they have already endured in His Name, God will allow them, and welcome them into His glorious presence in His temple, and then “*He who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them*” (Revelation 7:15) just as He pitched His tent – His ‘tabernacle’ in the midst of the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings in the Book of Exodus. All the blessings will be theirs. In ancient times it was a part of hospitality for a person to be invited in and the host would extend his tabernacle – his tent over you. That meant you were as good as family. The image of this is that God is extending His tent and saying you are not just saints – but you are His family! This is the image that God is showing – you are not just saints – but you are family – you are my children.

I have often said that when we look in the rear-view mirror of our lives we not only see God’s fingerprints on everything, but we also can see the effects of our sin, which are horrible. No one on this earth can ever escape the effects of sin. Even though people might try to deny sin and might try to cover up some sins and hide them or explain them away, there is no denying that sin is still sin. You must admit – all of us are born, and all of us will die. None of us can escape death; none of us can escape sin. God spoke through the Prophet Ezekiel, “*Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.*” (Ezekiel 18:4)

We cannot escape death, and no one escapes sin. Believers in Jesus are thankful because by God’s divine forgiveness - our sins, when we repent, are forgiven. They are washed away, and covered by the ‘Blood of the Lamb!’ Isn’t that truly amazing? Just the thought of that lifts me up because no matter what I do, or no matter what I say, or the horrible things I might think – when I ask God to forgive me – it comes pouring out like Jesus’ Blood. The blackness of our tarnished heart is covered by the Blood of Jesus Christ – there is no sin that you commit that

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cannot be covered by the Blood of Jesus, when you ask for forgiveness - so that we, like the saints, we read about today, who are standing before the throne of God, will one day also stand there with robes of righteousness. Not our righteousness, but HIS righteousness!

Salvation comes from the Lamb.

- the Lamb who is also our shepherd.
- who provides us with divine forgiveness
- And provides us with eternal life.

Looking at Revelation and seeing the visions of John, sometimes they are almost beyond human comprehension. Time and again we find the same people gathered there, the angels, the saints—singing out, *“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: “Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!”* (Revelation 7:10-12)

The angels, and the saints are there day and night worshipping Almighty God. There is nothing to worry about, nothing to fear, nothing to do except praise God; they do not get tired, so they can do it day and night - forever and ever. Talk about having a great job!

John tell us, *“Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”* (Revelation 7:16-17)

Please remember Jesus is not just the ‘*Lamb of God*’ but He is also the Good Shepherd. Jesus is not just the sacrificial Lamb, but He is the One who leads us to eternal life and to springs of the water of life – living water!

In closing, my brothers and sisters in Christ – on this Feast of All Saints, in spite of all the craziness of 2020, because of the love of Jesus, and what He has done for us, we do have a reason to rejoice today, give thanks and sing - for we, as believers in Jesus, are the saints of God!