
⁹After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.

¹⁰They cried out in a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!’ Revelation 7:9-10 (NRSV)

As we begin our meditation this day there are two things we may reflect upon by way of introduction.

First, for those who read our Bulletin and various prayer points, you will have noticed that in the past few weeks a number of our parishioners have had family members pass from this life. Whilst none of these have seen funerals conducted here at Grace, these family members are close family members: sisters, parents, brothers, and other family members. There are those who have asked for prayers, and then there are others here who have had families members pass from this life, but whose names have not been mentioned in our Bulletin. To me it seems that quite a number of our Parish members have had to deal with death, or the very real prospect of death due to grave illness. Reflecting of the theme of ‘All Saints’, then, has a very real aspect to it for us.

The second thing by way of ‘introduction’ is to imagine what it must be like in those congregations that have cemeteries that are nearby, or that surround, their church building – and to especially imagine what it must be like for those who remember ‘All Saints Day’ (and/or ‘All Souls Day’), and who visit their cemeteries and light candles for loved ones.

For some people the idea of having a cemetery on, or near, the ‘church grounds’ seems a bit morbid. But for those who have grown up with ‘church cemeteries’, not having a ‘church cemetery’ means that it is very easy for a community of faith to not always remember a very important aspect of our community of faith – all the saints in heavenly glory who are part of ‘the communion of saints’.

Every week when we gather together in worship we do so not only as a small group of people, and not only with all the hundreds of millions of people who worship this day, but also with ‘all the company of heaven’. And one day we too will, by God’s grace in Christ Jesus, form part of this ‘communion of saints’. It is inevitable, isn’t it? And rather than be fearful or sad about facing the prospect of this day, we are to joyful and to face that day with joy.

In our Scriptures this day we have the word of the Lord through the Apostle John of “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb”. And they are “standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white”. And they are able to cry out most confidently “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb”.

Is this our voice as well, whilst we live on this earth – “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb”...

The Apostle John had a glorious ‘vision’ of ‘the family of God’ in his ‘Revelation’. (And today I do not want to get into a detailed discussion of who this ‘John’ really was: there were reasons why Eusebius, in the 4th Century, and many so called ‘modern’ theologians ask questions about this: ‘reasons’ which tell us more of the author than the actual authorship of this ‘revelation’).

The Apostle John had a glorious ‘vision’ of ‘the family of God’ in his ‘Revelation’. We do not know the exact date of this ‘Revelation’ (and the ‘date’ will tell us something of the Roman Emperor at the time). But what we do know is that these were difficult times. John speaks of ‘the tribulation’ (or ‘ordeal’). People were being executed for their faith in Jesus (as people are even today!) And for those left behind a question was asked: where is God in all this suffering? John says (Revelation 7:14-15): *“They... have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship Him day and night within His temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them”*.

As people who had seen the blood of their relatives spilt in death, John speaks of ‘the blood of the Lamb’. This is rich imagery for God’s people (as we think of Old Testament animal sacrifices, and the death of Jesus).

The New Testament has much to say about the blood of Jesus Christ. We must be careful to give this phrase its full meaning. To us blood indicates death, and certainly the blood of Jesus Christ speaks of His death. But to the Hebrews the blood stood for the life. That was why the orthodox Jew never would--and still will not--eat anything which had blood in it (Genesis 9:4). The blood is the life and life belongs to God. When the Bible speaks about the blood of Jesus Christ, it means not only His death but also His life. The blood of Christ stands for all Christ did for us and means for us.

And so on ‘All Saints’ day it is appropriate to remember that we are ‘sinners, as we also rejoice in what God has done for us in and through Christ Jesus.

It is through the blood of Jesus Christ we all have cleansing from sin (1 John 1:7); the expiation of God’s wrath (Romans 3:25); we are justified (Romans 5:9); we have redemption (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:19); we have peace with God (Colossians 1:20), and our conscience cleansed to serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14).

John says of the people “they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”. The great crowd are in white robes. The Bible has much to say both about white robes and soiled robes. In the ancient world this was a very natural picture, for it was forbidden to approach a god with robes which were unclean.

The picture was still further intensified by the fact that often when a Christian was baptized they were dressed in new white robes. These robes were taken to symbolise a person’s ‘new life’.

And so when John is speaking about 'robes made white in the blood of the Lamb' He is speaking about the forgiveness of sin, and our sure of hope of standing before God in heavenly glory – because of the blood that Jesus shed.

Yes... there are difficult times in life... times when we have to say 'goodbye' to loved ones from this life... and that time when we will have to say 'goodbye' to our loved ones... But we have a sure place before God through the blood of Jesus. John says, "*They are before the throne of God, and worship Him day and night within His temple*".

This, then, has very two very important implications for us... The first implication has to do with how we shall face 'death'.

Death is real. It is something that cannot be avoided. But as Christians we face 'death' with a certain confidence – not that we should 'look forward to it' or 'embrace it', for as Scripture says, death is the enemy (1 Cor.15:26). But Jesus went the way of the cross to defeat death. And so there is a significant word within our Scripture this day.

In Revelation 7:15 the King James Version has it that he who sits upon the throne shall dwell among them. That is a perfectly correct translation, but there is more in it than meets the eye. The Greek for 'to dwell' is *skenoun*, from *skene*, which means a tent. It is the same word as is used when John says that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). The Hebrews connected this with another word which was somewhat similar in sound. This word is *shechinah*, the visible presence of the glory of God.

Those who have been faithful will have the entry into the very presence of God. Jesus said: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

Think of the names and faces of the ones that you love – those who have gone home to the Lord. Now picture them before the Throne of God. Try to imagine their joy and their peace. There is happiness there.

The second 'implication' for us actually has to do with how we approach 'life'.

The image through the vision of John is of a crowd praising the Lamb. The crowds once praised Jesus as He entered Jerusalem. We praise Him that He went through death to give the gift of eternal life. The picture of 'heaven' is of a joyous victory celebration, and it reminds us of our responsibility toward worship, and the joy and privilege of worship.

Someday, we must depart this world and stand before God. How much time do we spend making sure that we are close to the only one who has defeated death and brought the gift of eternal life? How much time do we spend thanking Him with our lives? John had a vision of a great crowd who (Revelation 7:11b-12) *fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"*

We are not in this alone, and if we were, we'd never make it. There is no such thing as a lone ranger Christian.

We are baptised into the body of Christ, and it is in the body of Christ that we are raised to resurrection life and empowered to live the resurrection life. That's what this All Saints Day is about. It is about rejoicing in the gift of life itself through the blood of Jesus. There is joy in living.

We gather here as God's family to read and hear the Scriptures, and to eat and drink, in the company of Mary Magdalene, and John the Apostle, and Stephen the martyr, and all Christian martyrs, and all who died in the faith... including those we have named today and those whom we hold in our hearts. In this celebration, as in our regular celebrations of the Lord's Table, we become conscious that we are living and praying in company. *"They... have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship Him day and night within His temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them"*. Amen.