

All Saints Sunday –November 2, 2014
Text: Revelation 7:9-17
Theme: “Memorial or Celebration?”

Today we celebrate All Saints Day. It is a day on which we take the time to remember those who have gone before us into paradise. I’m always frustrated at a funeral when all I hear about is the earthly life of the deceased. I went to my Uncle John’s funeral when I was a teenager and listened to person after person talk about what a great guy he was. Even the pastor talked about what a great guy he was and this confused me since my Uncle John had lived in Florida for the last 40 years, never darkened the door of a church and this pastor, who buried him in North Carolina, had never even met him.

Now I loved my Uncle John, but he was not a wonderful person. He and I were a lot alike: impious, impatient, sarcastic perfectionists who are never completely satisfied with others or ourselves. In reality, only people who knew him really, really well liked him and some of those who knew him best, hated him. So the whole funeral seemed pretty shallow and fake to me.

If all we do is remember the earthly lives of those who go before us, and mourn quietly that they are no longer with us, we miss the point of being Christians. Neither is that the point of All Saints Day. Listen to some of the words of “For All the Saints,”

The golden evening brightens in the west;
Soon, soon to faithful warriors cometh rest;
Sweet is the calm of paradise the blest.

We remember that the faithful warriors who fought the fight of faith are still alive and well. They are currently enjoying the sweet calm of paradise the blest. My Uncle John lives. He is no longer frustrated with failures in life. He is no longer searching for something to bring meaning to his life. He is alive and well in the presence of God Almighty. The hymn goes on.

And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong.

I saw my uncle make millions of dollars and rise to the pinnacle of his profession. Yet he was miserable. New luxury cars, exotic vacations and fancier homes did not satisfy him. He needed a closer relationship with Christ, but he would not hear of that until he was near death. I saw him go from a giant of a man, a man who ruled the room the moment he entered, to a withered, frail shell, eaten alive by a disease he could not beat. Today we remember that the people who we saw beaten down in this life, weak and sick in hospital beds or nursing homes are now restored. They are brave and strong warriors in heaven. The saints are glorious. So today is

not a day of sadness and mourning but a day of celebration for the people who have made it.

You and I are like prisoners of war who are rooting for buddies as they successfully escape the camp. In Revelation, John asks, "Who are these people in the white robes?" And the answer is,

"These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵"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.

¹⁶They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷For 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."

Today is a day of great celebration for all the ones who have made it out of this veil of tears, into paradise and now wait for the full culmination of God's promises. See, a funeral is not about how great the ones who died were. Maybe they were and maybe they weren't but who cares? If we live only for this life, then we are to be pitied more than anyone else. If our funeral is supposed to be a recitation of our successes on this earth, then we are all miserable failures. But a funeral is a celebration not of this life, but of the certainty of the life to come!

Today is not just a day of remembering who among us has made it out of here and arrived home. Today is also a day of looking forward to the day when we will join them. All Saints Day is a day of celebrating the time that is coming for all of us. The hymn goes on.

But, lo, there breaks a yet more glorious day:

The saints triumphant rise in bright array;

The King of Glory passes on His way.

**Jesus will return with all the Saints. The day will come when Jesus and the Saints will break into this world and we will be reunited with those we love and with our Lord whom we have served. Today, we celebrate by looking forward to the end of this world and the beginning of the new world that is to come. Today we join with all the saints, shouting Alleluia! Come Lord Jesus! Alleluia!
AMEN!**