

Sermon 2009 All Saints' Day
November 1, 2009
Text: Revelation 7:13-17
Theme: "Our Big Brother Returns"

Life is pretty good for us. We have our ups and downs but all in all life is fairly sweet. We live in comfortable homes, have adequate transportation, health insurance, plenty of food. It is a little different for us than it was for the people to whom St. John wrote the book of Revelation. St. John's people were in fear for their lives. In general they had little to nothing in worldly goods and their faith was illegal. They met wherever they could for worship and tried to avoid both Romans and Jews who were not friendly toward this new way of belief.

Every now and then we get a wakeup call though. The most recent one was September 11, 2001 when our financial hood ornament in this country was leveled. Before that day, the thought that someone could walk right into this country and destroy one of our finest creations never crossed my mind. As I watched the towers fall, the feeling reminded me of the first time someone really punched me. I was in 6th grade and a certain 7th grader, it would be indiscrete to mention his name, Everett Sharpe, decided that I should hand over my newspaper collection money to him. I disagreed...vehemently. He punctuated his argument by punching me in the mouth and I remember the first

thought that crossed my mind was one of genuine shock. I simply could not believe that he had punched me. How could that happen? I mean boys argue and push and shove and posture but you never actually punch the other guy...with your fist...but apparently no one ever told Everett Sharp that little detail. I had always been able to talk my way out of every confrontation, but Everett had all the conversational skills of a zombie and just a little less personality and he was not amused by my persuasive communication. So he just punched me in the mouth and took my money. Later that afternoon, my older brother who was 20 and about the size of my son Neal was able to explain to Everett why it would be bad for his continued health to ever do that again and he retrieved my paper route money and left Everett there soiling himself. But, even today, I clearly remember the shock I felt at the thought that someone could just haul off and punch me in the mouth. I felt that same feeling when I watched the twin towers fall.

On that day, the real world came crashing into our little fantasy and reality struck a cruel blow, the same kind of blow we are dealt when we face death as well. We all know that death is coming. We're all dying. Sometimes, we are even given warning signs that it will be soon. And yet we are NEVER prepared for it when it comes. My

mother was 81 with bone cancer when she died and yet every one of us were shocked the day she died. Every one of us felt like we had been punched in the stomach because we all have that little part of us that denies death and pretends that it won't reach us...until it does.

All Saints Day is the day we remember that while death can knock the wind out of us, death does not have the final say. My big brother was my protector on that day that Everett decided that he would take what was mine. My brother was a big, college jock and must have seemed infinitely powerful to Everett. See, Everett came from a family where not only would his brothers not have defended him; his brothers were mean and abusive to him as was his father. Everett never saw it coming that an older brother could and would intervene for his younger brother and make right the injustice that was done just the way Jesus Christ intervenes for us.

We wash our robes in His blood. He did the bleeding but we receive what that blood won. We stand at the foot of the Throne of Grace with tears streaming down our faces as we struggle with all the losses that we endure in this life. We lose people we love. We lose health. We lose income. Sometimes it seems as though those the towers of our lives are falling like a house of cards and in the midst of

all that chaos stands our protector. He stands tall in the midst of our troubled lives and calls us blessed.

That's right, blessed; even you; you and me who struggle every day just to get through the day and still be able to respect ourselves. You and me, who make choices that we know are wrong but we just don't have the strength to make what we know is the right choice. You and me who struggle every day to believe that God has it all under control when we face cancer and death and loss and failure. You and me. Our oldest brother, Jesus, comes to us with the authority and power of His Father in Heaven and he washes us in the water of Baptism marking us as his own. He places us under his protection so that all the demons of hell know that if they mess with us, they mess with him. He feeds us with his own body and blood and he holds us in his arms and wipes away our tears which will flow for now.

For now we live in the world of Everett Sharpe. We live in the world where people fly planes into buildings killing thousands. We live the world where young men die horrible deaths in foreign lands, blown up by people with strange ideologies who have bombs strapped to their chest. We live in a broken world. But the day will come my brothers and sisters. The day will come and it is that day we celebrate on All

Saints Day. On that day our oldest brother will return for us and all whom we have lost will be raised and we will be given new and perfect and holy bodies and EVERY LOSS WILL BE RESTORED. On that day, we who are joined through Baptism to the Lord Jesus will be restored and made whole again and on that day every tear will be wiped from our eyes...in fact, we will not even remember ever crying because we will know only joy...complete and utter joy. AMEN.