

**SERMON DRAFT**

**Text: Revelation 7:(2-8) 9-17**

**Sermon: All Saints Day 2017**

Just a month or so after the attack of September 11, 2001 that the president told us the war our country was and is now fighting is different from all previous wars we've fought. If for no other reason, this war is different because it will never end, we were told. There will always be terrorists seeking to attack us, to damage or destroy us. We were told we must always be vigilant in trying to detect these attacks before they occur, vigilant to eliminate terrorists and their threat before they strike us.

Within months of the infamous attacks of September 11, 2001, in New York City, Washington DC, and that field in Pennsylvania, we were already battle-weary and crying for restoration to normalcy in our lives. Instead, we've come to accept a new definition of normalcy, whether we like it or not.

Traveling by airplane is inconvenient. Passports are required for countries we used to visit without. Security is at an all-time high. Fear over the continued supply of oil drove gasoline prices up drastically—and with them the prices of so many other goods and services—and we tired of complaining about this years ago. Profiling our fellow citizens and visitors to this country was and still is a source of anger for many. But that, too, is something to which we've resigned ourselves. And then again as now we have the issue of immigration and control of our borders?

In the midst of these problems of the past and the gloom that seems to be everywhere now, one might look to the future in hopes of better things to come. That, too, might paralyze us with fear, dread, and disappointment. But our text for this festival celebrating God's work in all the saints assures us that the saints are signed, sealed and will be delivered by Jesus Christ.

So where do we children of God turn in faith in Christ Jesus, our only Savior from sin? Where do we turn for hope, encouragement, and strength to remain faithful to the faith put in us by the Holy Spirit in Baptism? How can we imitate and follow the example of the saints in heaven described in today's First Reading from God's Word, who come **"out of the great tribulation"** and who **"have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"** (v 14)? How do we get where they've gotten?

The answer is quite simple and clear in today's text. But it's not easy. It's one that can make us war-weary just hearing it. It's one that we often would prefer not to know, because it's not easy to abide by. That's because it promises us terrible tribulation until God delivers us safely home to eternal life in the glory of his heaven.

Yet at the same time, it gives us once again God's faithful promise that he has done, and is doing, absolutely everything necessary to save us from the damning power and guilt of our sin and to take us safely, in faith, all the way home for eternity in the perfect glory of heaven.

That's what God is doing in verse 3 just prior to today's text when he tells us through John's revelation that Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit **"have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."** The Greek word for *sealed* means "to set a mark or seal on us in faith to serve as protection and also identification."

All those he has made his children in faith in the sin-purifying waters of Baptism, God is protecting. That Baptism is when the Holy Spirit signed us into saving faith in Christ crucified, when the sign of his cross was made over our foreheads and our hearts.

He is thus identifying his believers as his dearly loved possessions, whom Christ Jesus bought with his sin-free lifeblood on Calvary's center cross.

This saving act not only destroyed all the power of all our sin, death, and hell, but it also strikes unquenchable fear in Satan. Satan, therefore, relentlessly and futilely seeks to prevent the Holy Spirit from delivering us safely, in faith, into the **"multitude that no one could number"** (v 9) in heaven, those Christ Jesus himself has robed in white (v 14).

And this ongoing action of the Holy Spirit in us, which he works through the Gospel power of God's Word and Sacraments, is the sealing action of God in us, in faith, just as it was for all the saints who from their labors rest in the loving arms of the Lamb of God in heaven.

In those arms they do not hunger, thirst, or cry from the war-weariness of the great tribulation they endured in this sinful world. But we do! We're still war-weary in the great tribulation of this world we endure for the sake of Christ Jesus and his Gospel. That's because this world still considers the sealing Gospel so offensive and terrifying, since it implies that they have sin from which they need saving.

That's why God continues to protect and identify us as his redeemed children in faith. That's why he continues to seal us with the assurance of his forgiving love in the Gospel promise—Christ Jesus coming to Bethlehem to die in our place on Calvary's cross.

That is the ongoing and even more relentless sealing and delivering the Holy Spirit does in fulfilling his guarantee work, in which he specializes.

Because the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts signed by our Savior's cross, we have God's guarantee in this, his presence, that we will inherit heaven. This is God's guaranteed delivery into the glory of his heaven, where the white-robed, palm-waving saints sing our enthroned Savior's praises. They sing well-rested and triumphant through God's faithful delivery out of the great tribulation, where we still have tears.

In this high-definition picture revealed in today's text, God's Word gives us his faithful promise: **"He who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence"** (v 15). Even as we still cry our way through the great tribulation we all must endure in this life, he will shelter us until he takes us home to the glory of heaven. God lives with us through faith—in a very real way in his Word and Sacraments—right here and now, much like a family lives together intimately now.

This includes living with the sorrow, pain, and tears this sinful world causes God's believers until God turns them to joy. This is his sealing and delivering of us home to heaven, as surely as he did the very same for every single saint in that ***"great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands"*** (v 9).

By Calvary's cross, delivered to us at the baptismal font and the Lord's altar, God has signed and sealed us in his grace. In that grace we already now stand in faithful assurance alongside the saints triumphant, and one day we will be delivered to join them in praising God, from whom all blessings flow!

Amen