

“For all the saints, who from their labors rest, who thee by faith, before the world confessed, your name O Jesus, Be forever blessed. Alleluia! Alleluia!” On this day we consider all saints in Christ, we examine our first reading from Revelation 7. We learn: **THE LORD BRINGS HIS SAINTS OUT OF THE WILDERNESS INTO PARADISE.**

First, we see I. The Lord seals His Saints for the wilderness journey. “Thou wast their rock, their fortress, and their might; Thou, Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight; Thou, in the darkness drear, their one true light.” As we consider the saints who have passed away to be with Jesus, we look with admiration on how they relied on Christ for their strength in times of testing and trouble.

As we consider the sealing of the 144,000 that go forth in our text today, we see the saints of old who made it from this world into the next because of Jesus Christ their captain who fought for them.

“Oh, may Thy soldiers, faithful, true, and bold, Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old And win with them the victor’s crown of gold!”

And so too, the Lord seals you for the struggles of this life. Through baptism, the Lord has written His name on your forehead and you are His. You are strengthened by Word and the Sacrament to endure the pain and suffering of the tribulation that is this life here on Earth. You are part of the 144,000 who goes out into battle in this world.

Taking a step back, we see the book of Revelation altogether has many horrific scenes: war, famine, and bloodshed. The sun is darkened and false Christs lead many astray. It doesn’t surprise me when many are hesitant to attend Bible study when that’s the book we’re exploring. This world is a wilderness to be trudged through and there are many dangers and unexpected reversals of fortune.

Needless to say, things could be worse, but the culture in which we live is not as hospitable to Christianity as it once was. Somebody once said that there used to be a time that if you weren’t in church on Sunday, you’d lie about being in church even if you didn’t go. Now the shoe is on the other foot: perhaps we’re embarrassed that we are attending church. Perhaps this is especially true if you’re a college student. People just assume everyone stays out until 2 in the morning partying. To think that someone got up early to be here bright-eyed and bushy tailed: that is the counter-cultural thing.

We live in a world where death is all around us. If we aren’t suffering from persecution from the faith, it seems like we are fighting off sickness, sudden injury, or death. All of us know a loved one who has died whether it be a grandma, a parent, a child, a spouse, or a close friend. In what sense can we say that we’ve been sealed and protected from the assaults of sin, death, and the devil when we keep on being persecuted for the faith and we keep on going to funerals?

“Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine! We feebly struggle, they in glory shine; Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine.” How it is we feebly struggle! The Church on earth is a gathering of saints, but it seems bombarded on every side.

But on this day, we rejoice because II. The Lord celebrates with His Saints in paradise. Revelation 7 gives us a glimpse into what’s going on in heaven while we struggle against sin, death, and the devil. **“After this I looked, and behold, a 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, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!””**

These Christians who now stand before the throne of the lamb are not only the picture perfect saints about whom we hear stories and consider to be all-stars of the faith. These saints before the throne are the spouses, parents, grandparents, children, siblings, and friends who have died in the faith who we miss dearly, who are not gone, but are here even now, sheltered in Christ’s presence.

The palm branches in the hands of the great multitude reminded hearers of the Old Testament festival of booths, even celebrated today in modern Judaism. Jews would make a pilgrimage to the Temple of Jerusalem and dwell in tents for a week. In fact, the feast takes place this time of the year. Essentially, it was a big party and it’s the only festival in the Old Testament where the Israelites are commanded to rejoice. You *do* have a right to party at the feast of booths.

One of the ways they are commanded to rejoice is by waving a bouquet of fruit, palm branches, leaves, and willows. This could be the palm branches we see referenced in Revelation 7.

The Old Testament Feast of Booths foreshadows what life is like in heaven. The Israelites gathered at Jerusalem from all over the known world. It was a grand reunion of family and friends. This is how the Saints in heaven celebrate now—even better, with saints from times past and present.

The Israelites gathered to rejoice that the Lord delivered them from slavery in Egypt and sustained them throughout the forty years in the wilderness. Even better yet, in heaven, the Saints celebrate that Jesus came to the Earth to live a perfect life, to die on a cross to forgive their sins, and to rise again to go to paradise. They celebrate because Jesus took them from the wilderness to the promised land of heaven. Jesus has defeated death, and they no longer will be persecuted or suffer for their faith.

The Israelites gathered in the presence of the Lord near the Temple of Jerusalem in makeshift shelters of wood, cloth, and palms. Even better yet, the saints gather before the eternal presence of Christ, and instead of makeshift

shelters, they are sheltered in the presence of God, no longer hungry, no longer thirsty, no scorching heat, and the Lamb will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

And so we think of Lena, Linda, Janet, Pauline, and Grant, all of whom are faithful departed members who have passed away since the last time we gathered for All Saints. I think of our former District President, John Wille, who died fighting cancer this summer. These and countless others that we name in our hearts have joined this greater festival of booths, the Marriage Feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom which has no end. For this, we rejoice.

But it doesn't make death stink any less, does it? It doesn't make persecution for the faith disappear. All Saints Day is a wonderful day to reflect on the faithful departed, but what about me today? Our hymn reminds us: "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."

III. The Lord seals you to celebrate with them, also. When the last hymn plays, and you walk out these doors, remember that the Lord has sealed you to join these saints who celebrate even now their exodus from the wilderness and their entrance to the promised land. He has sealed you with the waters of Baptism, and He feeds you with His body and blood. He has set His Word in your ears and on your tongue to preserve you between now and then.

There is an entire genre of Psalms called the Songs of Ascent, namely Psalm 120–134. Some believe that the Jews sang these Psalms on the way to Jerusalem. Likely, Jews throughout history have sung these songs on the way to the feast of booths. A couple words of encouragement to you who mourn on this day:

Psalm 121: **"I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep."** As you go about this life, remember that the Lord continues to watch over you. The worst that can happen is death, and Jesus has made it so that death becomes the path to life everlasting.

Also, Psalm 126: **"When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them.""** On that day when you join the saints before the Lamb's throne, it will be better than your wildest dreams. Your mouth will be filled with laughter, and your tongue with shouts of joy. The joys of heaven, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting, make this world's suffering pale in comparison.

Rejoice, dear friend. The Lord has sealed you to go out into the battles of this life, even as He has saved those Christians who have died in the faith. He will preserve you on the pilgrimage from this wilderness to the paradise of eternal life.