

Sermon - November 3, 2024 - All Saints' Day Pastor Ventura
End of Time Series – The Triumphant Church
What Happens When We Die Revelation 7:2–17

Dear Friends in Christ

Grace and peace from our Lord, the Lord of Life, Jesus Christ.

November is the month in which we meditate and ponder on the end of Time, which has to do with Christ's return, the resurrection of the dead, judgment, and life everlasting for those in Christ. Those are the themes for the next few Sundays, and so we start today, but given that today we observe All Saints Day, we will focus on the Triumphant Church, as per the reading from the book of Revelation. And as we consider the Triumphant Church the Church that is in heaven already, we pray that from this the Militant Church, you and I, will inspiration, encouragement, and comfort, especially when remember those who have gone before us already. And that are already in the presence of God enjoying the bliss of Heaven. Since All Saints Day commemorates the departed, mainly, I want us to ponder on this, what happens when we die?

What happens when we die, is the questions many of ask. Although talking about death is not something we are ready to do. Death is not something we accept easily; it is important that we do for the sake of expediency, especially since we Christians we have a unique perspective on death, a perspective that is radically different from the world around us. Yes, talking about death makes us nervous, and I it could be even harder for those still grieving the departure of loves ones.

Personally, All Saints Day forces me to remember those who I officiated at their funerals and burials. It is not easy. During the first 10 years of ministry here I officiated so many funerals, that, was becoming harder for me, for two reasons, one was the amount of God's people leaving us already, I didn't want to accept it, because we were shrinking in size. And second, because of the closeness and friendship we established with many. Pondering about that I realized that indeed burying somebody is a bittersweet thing. Bitter because well we don't see them for now. Much tears and grief indeed! But sweet, sweeter, actually, because of where they are now. In heaven. With Jesus!

The Bible teaches that death is not an annihilation in which we cease to exist. Rather, death is the separation of our eternal soul from our mortal bodies and only for a time, because at the last day of this world, upon Jesus' return, our bodies will resurrect join our souls and spend eternity with God with our restored and renewed bodies. In the meantime, our bodies rest in the grave, into the ground, the tomb, their resting place, until Jesus second coming, and on that day our bodies will be raised from the

grave, joined to our souls, and we will stand with the whole world before the judgment throne of God. But at the moment of that separation, the soul of all those who die in Christ, upon death go immediately into the presence of Christ to enjoy already His presence, peace and joy.

How do we know that? Consider the words Jesus told the thief who was crucified next to Him on His right, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43b). Obviously, the physical remains of Jesus and the body of the thief remained on earth. Nevertheless, the words of Jesus were fulfilled when at the moment of death, the believing thief and Jesus were immediately with God in heaven. So it is with the soul of the believer, of the one who trusts Christ, will dwell with Christ in Paradise, which is far better than here, the apostle Paul says: “I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.” (Phil. 1:23) he told the Philipians.

But the one who doesn't believe will go to a different place. To prison the apostle Peter tells us. This is what he wrote: “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey...” (1 Peter 3:18-20a) Not it is not purgatory, rather it is a holding place, but they too are awaiting the resurrection, but not for life eternal, as the Christian is, but for eternal condemnation.

Those who believed in Jesus as the long-promised Messiah will then enter—soul and body—into heaven. Those who reject the grace of God in Jesus will then be consigned—soul and body—into hell. There are no exceptions. The Bible plainly states there are no valid excuses for unbelief because God has made Himself known through man's inner voice and through the evidence of the things He created. Neither will there be a second chance to acquire eternal salvation after death. The Bible is perfectly clear. “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgement.” (Hebrews 9:27). It is now or never. “Thus says the Lord: “In a time of favour I have answered you; in a day of salvation I have helped you...” (Isaiah 49:8a).

Physical death is a horrible reality indeed. It is the enemy we each face at the end of our lives. Death is the awful curse that fell on creation through the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Through that sin, death came into the world and so death spread to all of humanity because all people sin. Some people see death a “natural” process. Sure, death is now part of the corrupted natural process, but for the Christian death is the door to heaven so to speak.

Although death was not God's original plan. His plan was life eternal in the company of the Creator. Death was not part of our created nature, but only something

that came about as the result of the sinful disobedience of our first parents—a sinful disobedience that has been passed down to every human being since that time. For those who don't trust Jesus Christ, the sting of death is indeed a horrible thing. They face, at the end of their life, only the prospect of an unknown future, even the reality of eternal damnation. However, the death of a Christian is not death as the unbeliever sees it. Death is the transition from this valley of tears and fears into the joys of paradise. For the Christian, death is the door into heaven itself. And that's what makes the funeral of a departed loved one, sweet, still bitter, but also very sweet.

And it gets better, hear what Revelations chapter 7 says regarding those who are in heaven already: "Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" ¹⁴ I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "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. ¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For 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." (Rev. 7:13-17)

No, those who have departed already, no, they don't turn into angels. That's what people say sometimes, right. Oh, heaven gained another angel! As much as we love the departed loved ones, they will not turn into angels, that is not what happens. John tells in this text that they are there, in God's presence, in their spirit yes, taking already possession of their citizenship in heaven as Paul says: "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ..." They are already there, in heaven. Heaven is their home!

What is the reason given here for these saints being in heaven? Are they there because of the great lives they lived, the number of boards on which they served, or the church council meetings that they attended? No, there is only one reason given for their status: "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb" (v 14).

The present reality of the departed, and your future reality as a congregation, your future as the church militant on earth, and your future as the Church Triumphant in heaven is based upon the blood of the Lamb, Jesus the Christ, that was shed on Calvary's cross to atone for your sin, for all sin! As John the Baptist proclaimed when he saw Jesus: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29). You are saints, holy ones, now and forever through the holy blood of Jesus, just

as the ones who are already there. They were sanctified by the blood of Jesus, their sins washed, cleansed, forgiven and restored! And upon the forgiveness of their sins, received in the waters of baptism, their names were written in the Book of Life, as Revelations explains in another part, just as your names are too, and once a name is written in the book of life, then their judgment is already taking place, that's what facilitates our entrance of our souls into heaven.

This vision in Revelation 7 is dripping with irony. The last thing you usually want on white robes would be blood; it stains permanently. But the blood that Jesus shed cleanses permanently, because it is a payment in full for sin. It is a blood that continues to cleanse you from sin today as you hear of it here and as you drink it at this altar. Just as the departed had done.

This is good news indeed! They are there, and one day if Christ hasn't come yet, we too will join them and this is what John says will happen: "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. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For 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 every tear from their eyes" (Rev. 7:15–17).

So here we are, today we observe All Saints Day. And on this day, we remember collective the dearly Departed! Their departure hasn't been without tears of pain and grief. You have shed some tears, no doubt, in saying a temporary goodbye to some of the saints of your extended family and church family who are now with the Lord. But so are our days in this world, days of pain and struggle. I'm sure we will shed more tears down the road. I'm sure we will grieve. But we don't grieve like those who have no faith in Christ do. Because even as we ponder of our own deaths today, remember that nothing ever has, nor nothing ever will, separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. One day we will rejoice the more as he will bring us into the arms of his love and grace, into his heaven, where he will lead us for eternity. There, there will be no more sin—no more hunger and thirst and struggle. Our baptismal garments will be exchanged for the permanent robe of resurrected glory, and God will wipe every tear of pain and suffering from our eyes.

Revelation 7 helps you to see your ultimate and certain future as forgiven saints through the blood of Christ: God himself will be with you, and he will wipe every tear from your eyes. Death will be no more, neither shall there be any mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore—and you will see his face! That is your bright and glorious future as saints through the blood of Jesus. Amen.