

The Festival of All Saints
St. Matthew 5:1-12
November 1st, 2020
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Great Is Your Reward in Heaven

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Almighty and Everlasting God, Who through Thine Only-Begotten and beloved Son, Jesus Christ, wilt sanctify all Thine elected and beloved: give us grace to follow their faith, hope, and charity, that we together with them may obtain eternal life; through Thy Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one true God, world without end. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

At Mount Sinai the Jews were forbidden to approach the mountain lest they be killed. Moses had instructed the Israelites that neither man, woman, child or livestock were to approach the mountain. The reason was that the Triune Lord God was to come down from Heaven and dwell on the mountain in the presence of His people. The Lord would speak from Heaven and give the Jews the Law—the Ten Commandments. The people of Israel—the descendants of the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—could not approach the mountain because they were unholy. That which is unholy cannot exist with that which is holy. The Triune Lord God is without sin. He is perfect. He is holy.

The Israelites were already unholy before the Ten Commandments were given. The Law was written on their hearts. They knew right from wrong and still always chose the wrong, just as we ourselves often do today. Furthermore, like us, they still possessed the inherited original sin of their first parents, Adam and Eve. They were already unholy, and when the Ten Commandments were given by the Lord God this only gave a written proof that we are unholy, and cannot approach the Lord God. For example, the Lord God had to wipe out the entire population except for Noah and his family because every inclination of mankind was toward evil. Even after the flood mankind still forsook the Lord God chasing after every sort of false god, but the One, True God.

Abraham had to be called away from his family and his false gods so that he could be given a land flowing with milk and honey by the Lord God. He was given a promised land. A land where Abraham's descendants could worship the Lord God in truth and purity. But even then, both the Northern and Southern tribes forsook the Lord God, chasing after the false gods of the peoples around them, whom they did not fully drive out. First the Northern Kingdom was exiled into Assyria, and then Judah, the Southern Kingdom, also was exiled into Babylon. They were brought back from exile some seventy years later, a shadow of the former glory that Israel had been during the days of Kings David and King Solomon.

They were unable to approach the mountain at Sinai because of their unholiness. They could not sit down with the Lord God. But our dear Lord + Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, came down from Heaven to be with His people; to dwell with His people. Unlike the first time, He took

upon Himself our flesh, so that He could sit down on the mountain with His disciples and teach them all the rewards that He would give them in Heaven. These rewards were not something that they could earn or buy. These rewards—these great rewards from Heaven—were given to them solely by grace. They were unworthy of the gifts, but our Lord + Jesus made them worthy by coming to be with His people.

Our reward is great in Heaven, for like His disciples, and like the crowds who followed Him and believed that He was the Christ, the Son of God, we too, place our trust in the works and merits of the Christ. We cling to Him for He has come down from Heaven to dwell with us. He instructed His disciples when He gave the Sermon on the Mount. Today, He instructs His people on the mountain of the Church. Here in this place He preaches into our ears the rewards that He has won for us. Here in this place—the local representation of the Church on Earth—He creates faith and life in us by His Blessed Sacraments. He teaches us to live in our Holy Baptism each new day. He teaches us to repent of our sins—to confess our sins to Him through the Pastor—so that He might absolve us, that is, forgive us, through the lips of the Pastor. He even feeds our sin-sick souls with His very own Body and Blood given in bread and wine for our forgiveness, life and salvation.

These means of grace are only a foreshadowing of the things to come. Water, Word, bread and wine are earthly things that impart to us heavenly things. These simple means give us the rewards of Heaven. They give us forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation. But these simple means are only a shadow of the great rewards that await us in Heaven. Our dear Lord + Jesus tells us what these rewards are in today's Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew.

Our first reward that our Lord + Jesus has come down from Heaven to give to us by taking upon Himself our flesh and fulfilling the Law of God perfectly for us and sacrificing Himself on the tree of the holy cross as a punishment for our sins, is the Kingdom of Heaven. He has come to fulfill the Law and suffer and die for us, so that He might give us the Kingdom of Heaven. He was poor in spirit, that is, He humbled Himself, to win for us a place in the Kingdom of Heaven. Indeed, on this Festival of All Saints we remember the faithfulness of those who have gone before us, and won their crown of eternal life through their faith in the Lord + Jesus. They serve as an example to us. They endure mourning, persecution, and trials and tribulations on account of their belief in the Lord + Jesus, even as we do many times in our society. They were given a place in the Kingdom of Heaven, and they clung in faith to the humility of our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ.

In their mourning they have now found comfort. They no longer suffer in this vale of tears. When this life and world causes us to mourn, we also find comfort. We find comfort in the Gospel that reaches our ears through the preaching of the Gospel and in the administration of the Blessed Sacraments. These comfort us as we traverse this world filled with sorrow. But these only provide a temporary comfort on our way to our eternal comfort in Heaven.

Those who have gone before us also enjoy the same thing that we will when our Lord + Jesus returns again on the Last Day. He will give to us and all the saints we remember today, a New Heaven and a New Earth. In this new place we will no longer have to cower in fear down in the valley just like the Israelites did at Mount Sinai. But there we will be able to dwell with the Lord God in the same way that the Apostles did on mountain where our Lord gave the Sermon on the Mount. We will sit down with Him and eat with Him and learn from Him. And He will feed both our souls and bodies with His holy Word. We get a foretaste of that whenever we hear His Word preached into our ears. But this is only a shadow of the things to come. Our reward is great in Heaven.

He will feed us and give us drink. We will never go hungry or be thirsty. Indeed, our hunger and thirst in this life should be for righteousness; the righteousness that our Lord + Jesus imparts to us through the waters of Holy Baptism, when He clothes us with His very own righteousness. He makes

us worthy to approach Him; to sit down and learn from Him through the waters of Holy Baptism. We bear His righteousness through the faith that He gives us through the Holy Ghost working through the means of grace. In faith we cling to Him and His righteousness. We cling to His perfect fulfilling of the Law on our behalf, and His suffering and dying on the tree of the holy cross in our place. We hunger and thirst for His righteousness that He won for us through His works and merits that He came down from Heaven to win for us.

We are not worthy of this great reward, but our Lord + Jesus is a merciful Lord. He does not treat us the way that we deserve to be treated, but He shows us mercy by taking our place on the cross. We deserved death and God's eternal wrath and displeasure, but our Lord + Jesus entered into the grave for us, so that He might free us from the bonds of death. We in turn treat our fellowman with mercy, knowing that we all deserve the same fate. We are all deserving of death. Therefore, we treat our fellowman with the same mercy that our Lord God gives to us. We do not treat them as they deserve to be treated, but show love and mercy to them.

When our Lord + Jesus calls us to our eternal home, we shall see the Lord God with our own eyes, even as all the saints enjoy the Beatific vision eternally. We shall see Him because He has cleansed our hearts and made them pure through the waters of Holy Baptism. He keeps us pure—He preserves us—by His Word and His precious Body and Blood given to us in bread and wine. When our Lord + Jesus comes again on the Last Day we will see the Son of God sitting on the right hand of the Father, and He will come to judge both the quick and the dead, and we will be given the crown of eternal life as we join with all the saints who have gone before us—the glorious Host arrayed in white—who sing His praise for all eternity.

We will sing His praise eternally because our Lord + Jesus has made peace between the Lord God and us. Therefore, we are rightly called the Sons of God, for we are His children recreated in His image. We have been born out of water and the Spirit, and are fed and clothed by our Triune Lord God through the means of grace. He provides for all of our wants and needs in this life, and indeed, He will call us out of this vale of tears to dwell with Him in His eternal home as we enjoy forever and ever our great reward of Heaven.

Great is our reward in Heaven for our dear Lord + Jesus, the Christ, humbled Himself to come down from Heaven to dwell with His people. The Jews at Mount Sinai stood afar off from fear of the holiness of the Lord God. But our Lord + Jesus took upon Himself our flesh, so that we no longer need to stand afar off in fear of Him. We can now sit with Him on the mountain. Indeed, He comes to teach us as we sit and learn from Him in the mountain of the Church. This Church will face persecution, just as our dear Lord + Jesus endured the cross and shame. But, my dear friends, great is our reward in Heaven. All the Saints enjoy that reward in Heaven now. We will join them when our dear Lord + Jesus calls us to our eternal home in Heaven. Therefore, rejoice and be exceedingly glad even in the midst of persecution, hatred and shame, for just as the prophets before you endure this and won their eternal reward, great is your reward in Heaven, also. May the dear Lord + Jesus preserve us in His Word until He calls us from this vale of tears to Himself in Heaven. There we will join with all the saints and angels and sing the eternal Liturgy of the Lamb in His Kingdom which has no end. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty and Everlasting God, Who, by Thy Son, hast promised us forgiveness of sins and everlasting life: we beseech Thee so to rule and govern our hearts by Thy Holy Spirit that in our daily need, and especially in all time of temptation, we may seek help from Him, and by a true and lively faith in Thy Word obtain the same; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!