

## Revelation 7:9-17

What is a saint? It depends on who you ask. Football fans will point to last year's Super Bowl winners, the New Orleans Saints. Children, especially next month, will talk about jolly old St. Nick. Winter vacationers may book a flight to St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands. Or we might simply point at the road signs toward St. Louis. Today is when the church observes All Saints' Day. But I don't think that all these "saints" were what the church had in mind when All Saints' Day was placed onto its calendar. The world has its saints, and so does God, and the difference between the two can be pretty extreme.

What does it take to be a saint in the eyes of the world? Forget about football and the decrees of the pope. It's pretty obvious that to be a saint you have to be a good person...at least on the outside. No one says, "He's a saint," about thieves, adulterers, or murderers. You've got to be a nice guy or lady. Perhaps you help others a lot. Perhaps you are very charitable with your income. Perhaps you just put up with a lot of abuse and never fight back or try to get even. In the eyes of the world being a saint has nothing to do with what you believe, but everything to do with how you live.

In the eyes of God, however, to be a saint is pretty much just the opposite. Sinners whom the world would despise, are saints to God. St. Thief-on-the-cross who repented...St. David, the adulterer with Bathsheba...St. Paul who used to be Saul the murderer of innocent people. I could go on, but you get the picture. Some of the worst people, judging by what their hands have done, are saints before God. Abraham slept with Hagar because he did not believe his wife, Sarah, could bear him a son. Moses killed an Egyptian and then hid for forty years. The low-life Publicans and despicable Prostitutes were coming to Jesus and repenting, and they now are God's saints in heaven with sinners like Abraham and Moses.

And I've got to tell you...all of this gives me hope. Because I've said things that have offended people. I've done things that I'm ashamed of. In the eyes of the world, I'm no saint. But thank God that He does not judge me by my words, thoughts, or actions. He declares sinners to be saints not because we deserve it, but because of Jesus Christ in whom we trust.

In Revelation 7 John sees all the saints of God in glory. "Who are these," he is asked, "And from where have they come?" "Sir," John replied, "You know." And here's the answer given: "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."

What is this tribulation? It's not some great Armageddon battle with Satan at the end of time. It is the daily struggle of Christians against their own sinfulness and against the temptations of the world and the devil. Saints do not live a life of ease. Saints struggle. If you're not struggling with your sins and with the sinful world around you, then are you really even a saint? The battle to resist the sinful flesh is a battle fought only by God's saints. King David struggled with his lust. Simon Peter struggled with over-confidence. Christians fight the good fight. They don't win every battle, but they stay in the fight.

As I tell my catechism classes, if you're concerned that you've lost the faith because you gave in to sin, then you should not be concerned. If your conscience bothers you, that's God at work within you. Those who should be concerned, are not concerned. Those who take God's name in vain and think nothing of it. Those who consistently miss church and it doesn't bother them anymore. Those

who disobey parents as their way of life. If you struggle with these, and with all of God's Commandments, that's good. Saints struggle...the people of the world give in.

And so when you struggle this week to do the right thing; when you struggle to resist temptation; when you struggle with your anger, your lust, your selfishness, your greed, do not question if you are God's saint because you struggle. We win some by the grace of God, and we lose some because we are weak. Just stay in the fight. Keep struggling. "Who are these dressed in white?" John was asked..."These have come out of the great tribulation." They were not perfect in thought, word, and deed. They did not always do the right thing. At times they did not act at all like saints. But they kept struggling. They kept fighting the battle against sin and temptation. And by God's grace, by His strength, by their clinging to His Son Jesus Christ they endured.

"Who are these in white?" John was asked. "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." All saints, God's saints and the world's saints, wear white robes. But there is a huge difference between God's saints and saints in the eyes of the world. The white robes worn by God's saints are washed in the blood of the Lamb of God. The white robes worn by the world's saints are washed in their own good works. Their white, therefore, is a false white. The white robes the world's saints wear will darken and become black with sin and guilt under the accusing finger of God in the Judgment. But God's saints wear white robes that last forever. Washed in the blood of Jesus, they stand before God in the Judgment. He declares them pure and innocent for Jesus' sake.

Where does such a robe come from? It's given to you in your baptism. There in the waters of Christ's blood God dresses you with the robe of Jesus' innocence. There He declares you His forgiven child. There your sins are washed away. Now we need to note here that God's saints are not pure and white...but their robes are white. As I showed the children earlier, we are sinful through and through, but our sins are covered over by Jesus. We are, as Christian people, both sinners and saints at the same time. Other people may see your sins. You may see your own sins very clearly, and we should so we daily repent of them. But because God looks upon you through Christ Jesus, He sees only a saint.

In the Judgment you will not need to answer for all the bad things that you did in your life. You wear Christ by faith. He is your answer. God's accusing finger will not point at you because it already pointed to Jesus on the cross for you. There God's blood was shed on your behalf. There your white robe was purchased by His death, and in baptism it was given to you. Wear it always. Dress yourself with Christ every morning. Live a life of repentance trusting in Jesus Christ your Savior. That's what God's saints do. Every day they return to their baptism clinging, not to their own good works, but to Jesus.

So, dear friend, are you a saint? Well, this I know...you, like me, are a sinner. But are you a saint, not in the eyes of the world, but before God? Do you believe that you are a sinner? Do you struggle with your sinfulness and with temptation? Are you baptized into Christ? Do you plead His precious blood for the forgiveness of your sins? Then, yes, you are a saint. You may not feel like a saint. You may not live much like a saint...in the eyes of the world that is. But God's saints, no matter how they have lived, are forgiven. You are forgiven.

Whether you are a thief like the man on the cross, or an adulterer like King David, or a murderer like Paul, or whether you just struggle each day to live as a Christian in Augusta, Missouri...dealing with anger issues, with selfishness, with a lack of love for other people in your life...you are forgiven. God

does not look at the sins in your life. You are covered with Christ in whom you trust. God sees you in Jesus, and He is glad to call you His saint.

So how do saints like us live? Well, we live like sinners...because we are. But we live with joy because we are forgiven for the sake of Jesus. Will other people see us as saints? Maybe...maybe not. Hopefully we, as God's Christians, live lives pleasing to Him. But that is not what makes you who you are. You are called God's saints for one reason...because of Jesus. Amen.