

Homily – All Saints Day – 2020 – 1 John 3

Text – 1 John 3:2 – Beloved, we are God’s children now.

The celebration of All Saints Day reminds us of a place we never wanted to be. It brings us to the day when someone we know and love dies. None of us have been looking forward to these moments for the most obvious of reasons. We are faced with the reality that we now have to live with an emptiness in our lives. These people were so special that their death leaves a hole in our lives, a space no one else can fill. No one can replace them.

This day also asks a question. How do we deal with this moment? Some people look to the future with the perspective of fantasy. Some will believe in reincarnation; the belief that the dead will come back to life but in another form. But, the form into which they return depends on how good of a person they were in their first life. Somehow, I don’t find much comfort in living this life as a human being and in my next being a dog, a cow or a mouse.

Another popular misconception is that the dead become angels. This thought was brought into our minds through movies and even cartoons which had anyone who passed away receiving their wings, halos and harps just before they entered the pearly gates. Other satisfy their grief by believing that our angelic relatives and friends pass their days in eternity by watching over us, somehow amused and fascinated by how we continue to live our lives.

The worst way in which many face the future after death is believing that death is the end. No life beyond death. No angelic transformation. All they envision is a body moldering in the grave.

How do **we** deal with this moment? We do not live with a future painted by fantasy. We don’t face what lies ahead as the end of the road. We do not face the days in perpetual **grief, as others do who have no hope**. No, we have a reason why we see death differently than those hope is locked behind the curtain of superstition, reason, science and fantasy. Our reason for hope is that **we are God’s children now**. We are God’s children because of the One who shown His living light from the darkness of the tomb. We have hope because of the One who lives and who, after walking in triumph away from the grave on Easter morning,

appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time. In Jesus Christ, we have hope of the life that exists beyond the grave where we will be **standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in our hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”**

This is a promise of peace. This is a reason to rejoice. Sadly, this is a reason to be hated, to be persecuted and even to be killed. As St. John was writing his epistle declaring the life of the Gospel, he and his fellow apostles were being persecuted even to the point that 11 of the 12 were martyred for the faith. In our world today, people are still losing their life because of the one message which gives hope in Christ and promises life beyond death. It’s astonishing that the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ, His message of love and life, can be hated and reviled.

The reason for this denial of Christ’s saving truth can be found in one location. Ever since the world was created, the devil has been trying to destroy the peace and life given by God. Even today, he uses the same old line that he used on Eve that caused her to doubt God and His Word. He simply asked, **“Did God actually say...”** These four simple words caused mankind and all his descendants to question God and to fall under the curse of sin. For the sake of four simple words, everyone must die.

The devil’s tired old lie is still being hear with only just a slight amendment. Not only does he still seek to get all people to question the words and commands of God, he also attacks the foundational blocks of faith by asking, “Did that really happen?” Is the bible really the inerrant Word of God? Did God really create all things? Was Jesus born of a virgin mother? Did He really do all those miracles including casting out demons? Did He really die? Did He really walk from the grave and ascend into heaven?” Deny one of these and faith falls flat on its face.

If you have full confidence in God’s holy Word, the devil has another line of attack and this works very well. If he can’t confuse you, he will accuse you? He will say, “How can God love a sinner like you? How can such a guilty person believe they are going to heaven? That is a place for true saints, not you.”

With all that surrounds us, begging us to abandon our faith, it's not surprising the even many Christians look to what lies beyond the grave and begin to doubt. The devil is too strong for us. The world is too much for us. Our weak nature turns in on itself and questions if we're good enough. So, the devils lies and accuses. The world misleads and abuses. Our sinful flesh despairs and makes excuses. Where is our hope? Where does it come from?

Hope cannot be found anywhere else but in Christ Jesus our Lord. By His perfect life lived under the Law, we shared in His righteousness. By His sacrifice on the cross, the guilt of our sin has been washed away. By His resurrection, He has **abolished death and brought life and immortality to light**. Only through Jesus Christ and through the eyes of faith comes the hope which sees beyond this life and is confident in the promises of God. Through faith, we are able to endure the temptation to doubt and despair about what lies ahead.

The words of St. John's epistle declares the beauty of this love and hope. He begins by saying, "**See what kind of love the Father has given to us.**" Notice, His love is given free of charge, not earned by any merit or worthiness in us. It is love that is not measured out in droplets but is poured out lavishly and generously. This love is a pure gift from heaven.

Notice how this love changes us. Sin separates us and makes us enemies of God. Yet, through the love of the Father and the merits of Jesus Christ, we have been changed. We are now **called children of God**. We were declared to be part of God's eternal family through the sacrament of Holy Baptism. Through water and the Word, we are united with Christ through His death and resurrection and are children of hope in this life and heirs of His eternal kingdom.

But what shall our life be like beyond this life? The book of Revelation mentions white robes and singing. It states that there shall no more **hunger or thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike us, nor any scorching heat**. But what will we be like? We really don't know because **what we will be has not yet appeared**. The answer to that question must wait for the time of Christ's return.

When He appears, **we shall be like Him. We shall see Him as He is**, just as He was after He had walked from the tomb. We shall

possess a body like His, a glorified body; a body unmarked and unburdened by sin.

Until the hope and promise of faith is fulfilled on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, St. John reminds that **everyone who thus hopes in Jesus purifies himself as He is pure**. While we wait for Christ, we will be constantly be pressured by the devil and this world to sin, to build up our guilt until we begin to lose hope of God's love for us. But, by faith, we are daily reminded that **we are God's children now**. By baptism, we are His.

Through the divine service held here within His holy house, we have a sample of what is to come. We put on robes of forgiveness. We sing the praises of our God. We come before His throne of grace and offer our prayers to Lamb of our salvation. We gather around His holy table and partake in the feast which has no end. Here, our faith is strengthened. Here, our hope is renewed.

While we wait, we unfortunately will continue to sin but we do not have to remain in their guilt and shame. When we turn in contrition and repentance, desiring to be purified from our sin, our Savior continues to forgive our sin and declare us forgiven by His blood. By His blessed absolution, we are **purified as He is pure**.

Today, we remember those whom we knew and loved that have passed away. Were they holy, perfect people? No. Did they earn a place in heaven for themselves? No. Then what makes them so special? Christ does. He loved them so much that He was willing to die for them. He loved them so much that He diligently shepherded them through their life, sustaining them in their faith and protecting them from all evil. And now, they live His promise, the fulfillment of hope promised through the cross. These and so many other blessed saints now rest from their labors. We who remain praise God for blessing us with these faithful souls and we live in the hope of our reunion with them before the throne of the Lamb.

AMEN