

Title: All Saints Great and Small

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, we rejoice and sing your praises for all you have done for us; be with us in our good times and bad times, and may we always be aware of your loving-kindness to us and all those around us, through Christ Jesus, we pray. Amen.

During the dark days of World War II, England had a great deal of difficulty keeping men in the coal mines. It was a thankless kind of job, totally lacking in any glory. Most chose to join the various military services. They desired something that could give them more social acceptance and recognition. Something was needed to motivate these men in the work that they were doing so that they would remain in the mines.

With this in mind, Winston Churchill delivered a speech one day to thousands of coal miners, stressing to them the importance of their role in the war effort. He did this by painting for them a mental picture.

Churchill's speech was short for a Churchill speech, about five minutes. It was another typical speech encouraging the miners of their role in the war effort. It was not particularly memorable until the last paragraph.

“We shall not fail, and then some day, when children ask, ‘What did you do to win this inheritance for us, and to make our name so respected among men?’ one will say: ‘I was a fighter pilot’; another will say: ‘I was in the Submarine Service’; another: ‘I marched with the Eighth Army’; a fourth will say: ‘None of you could have lived without the convoys and the Merchant Seamen’; and you in your turn will say, with equal pride and with equal right: ‘We cut the coal.’”

We are told that there were tears in the eyes of many of those soot laden and weathered faced coal miners. They had been given a sense of their own self-worth by the man at the top. Service does not always come with big fancy ribbons. And I think it is forever true, that humble acts of service provide us with the deepest sense of joy and the most fulfilling satisfaction.

There were many saints who served in World War II. We still hear stories of the heroes. We can still watch Audey Murphey movies portraying his true-life heroics. No war can succeed without the countless, anonymous support people. It was U.S. women who built the war machines because the men were subscribed. It was the women who held the country together. Saints do not always get the press.

Just as Churchill encouraged a nation at war, making sure that everyone knew that their efforts were important, John of Patmos encouraged a church under persecution. At the time Revelation was written, persecutions were localized. It was not until the third century that there was an empire-wide persecution. Then in the fourth century, Christianity conquered the empire. John of Patmos had, basically, two messages for the churches addressed in his letter: 1) your dead friends and loved ones have a glorious eternity, and 2) you will be vindicated.

The author of Revelation, John of Patmos, saw many visions. His writing style was to describe a vision and then segue into the next by saying, "After this I saw" or "After this I looked ...". John saw four angels at the four corners of the earth. (The earth was thought to be flat in those days.) Another angel orders the four to do damage to the earth until those chosen to be marked are sealed. The numbers are done in multitudes of 12, 12,000 for each of the twelve tribes of Israel, making the total 144,000.

144,000 are a lot of people. Then as the Ronco commercials would say, "Wait, there's more!" After this John looked and there was a great multitude that was beyond count all robed in white. This crowd was not limited to the 144,000 Israelites and Jews, but included people from every group and subgroup in the world.

This is a vision of a united humanity. This is a vision where differences between people don't matter. This is a vision where language, culture, and skin color doesn't matter. In looking at this vision, we are reminded of someone who said, "I have a dream."

In a scene out of Palm Sunday, they waved palm branches shouting about God's salvation that comes through Christ Jesus, the Lamb. Their robes represent purity, their branches victory. It was a gesture reserved for kings.

John says all the angels and the four living creatures worshipped God and sang. Since all the angels were there, I presume the four holding up the corners of the earth must have let go of the earth to join the throng.

The four living creatures are a curiosity. This can also be translated as four living beings, which is likely a better translation as the creatures in Revelation are like the beings in Ezekiel. Ezekiel's beings look like the ones in revelation and are called cherubim. Cherubim are known in most of the ancient middle eastern cultures and are known as guardian deities. Four living beings surround God's throne in Daniel.

In Ezekiel, they have four faces. In Revelation, each face is a separate creature and they are covered in eyes. They know when you are sleeping. They know when you are awake. They know when you are bad or good. They put Santa Claus to shame, for goodness' sake.

One of the elders asks John who these white robed people are. John confesses ignorance. The elder says these are the ones who came through the great ordeal, presumably persecution. They washed their robes in the blood of the lamb and made them white.

They suffered on earth. Now they are with God. In joyful response to God, they worship night and day. Heaven likely doesn't have night and day. I think this means that their worship of God is constant. They are the martyred saints, vindicated by God, and now are members of the heavenly company.

They will no longer hunger. They will never be thirsty. They will not suffer from the heat of the sun. God is no longer distant. God and humans are united.

The Lamb will be their shepherd. The Lamb will lead them to the water of life. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." They have no longer any reason to be sad. But they might shed tears of joy.

We were in New Zealand during their spring and the pastures were full of new born lambs. It was the lambs who followed their mothers. In Revelation, it is the sheep who follow the Lamb.

This is the New Testament version of Psalm 23. The people of God are the central part of this reading and in heaven. It is the love of the Lamb, Christ's love, that pulls in these worshippers. This was written for a people who are suffering persecution. But for us who do not suffer persecution, this is an assurance that the same God whom we commune with now, will be the same God we encounter in the next life.

No matter how much suffering we endure in this life, we have a better future. Jesus died so we may live. Death is not the finality of our existence. This gives us hope of a future victory of God with a united human race. God's faithfulness stretches beyond time and our own existence.

St. Paul refers to all baptized Christians as saints. All Saints' Day is a day for all of us. We celebrate ourselves. It is not, necessarily, a time to remember some who lived an exceptionally good life. It is to celebrate the salvation that is offered for all of us.

I don't know what we do in heaven, because I have never been there, yet. Maybe we worship God night and day, whatever that means. Maybe we just enjoy a timeless love where there is no night and day, where time is meaningless. I am convinced that we will be in a state of joy and love. God may wipe away every tear, but God won't wipe the smile off of our faces.

We are saints. We are blessed. We are forgiven. We are heirs with Christ in whose presence we will one day be.

Text: **Revelation 7:9–17** (NRSV)

⁹ After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ They cried out in a loud voice, saying,

“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

¹¹ And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² singing,

“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom
and thanksgiving and honor
and power and might
be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

¹³ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?” ¹⁴ I said to him, “Sir, you are the one that knows.” Then he

said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

¹⁵ For this reason they are before the throne of God,
and worship him day and night within his temple,
and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.

¹⁶ They will hunger no more, and thirst no more;
the sun will not strike them,
nor any scorching heat;

¹⁷ for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of the water of life,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#). (1989). (Re 7:9–17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.#