

Revelation 7:9-17, 2014

I want to talk about the reading from Revelation on this day when we remember all those who have passed on ahead of us to what the Church calls the “Church Triumphant.”

You may have heard that term and wondered what it really means. This passage paints that picture.

This passage is only about half of a complete passage that serves as an interlude between the breaking of the seven seals,

the first five of which contain a vision of death and terror coming to earth, all preceding the coming of God.

The sixth ends with the people hiding in the caves of the mountains pleading for the rocks to fall on them and kill them because they cannot bear to live and face God on His return.

So, John inserts this interlude before the breaking of the seventh seal providing a vision allowing the people of the early church

and us to see the sealing of God’s servants on earth; the Church Militant,

He then shifts his view to heaven and offers a vision of the Church Triumphant made up of those who have been through the great persecution, the great battle and have been victorious.

They gather around the throne of God and worship Him day and night.

Instead of seeing the expected End of time, what we see is the church,

the Church Militant on earth embattled with the powers of evil,

and the Church Triumphant victorious in heaven.

This is a very timely vision for the people of the first century church. They lived expecting the return of Christ at any moment;

not any day, of week or within the next 100 years, but at any moment.

This vision addresses the church during the time of persecution when the Christian church existed on the margins of society, under constant political suspicion.

They were small and lacking the impressive buildings and institutional structures that existed in the Synagogues from where many of them had come.

They were given no respect by their neighbors or the rest of the community.

The people of that time needed a vision of the church to which they belonged to give them hope and courage in faith that was tested daily.

John gives them that in this interlude.

He takes a time out from the vision of the difficulties of the present

to introduce the glories of the future.

The part of this vision that is in our reading for today is the vision of Church Triumphant.

Standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white with palm branches in their hands crying out

Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb!...Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen!

The church is among the angels, with the elders, and four living creatures all gathered to praise and serve God and the Lamb.

And why are they doing this?

That answer comes in the conversation between the elder and John in verses 13 and 14.

These are they who are coming out of the great ordeal: they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

It is the blood of the Lamb, the blood of Jesus Christ, that has washed these martyrs from their sin.

It is Christ's blood and His death that has given them the victor's white garment.

This passage, this book was important to the early church in the hope and promise that was provided through the vision of John.

It is still important for us today,

especially on this day when we remember the Saints who have died and gone before us.

A couple of things to note about John's vision that are still important to us.

I find this perspective interesting that John takes a time out from his vision of the difficulties of the present to introduce the glories of the future.

He does that for us also.

This passage addresses our lives today and our death whenever it comes from a heavenly perspective to give us hope in the promise God has made to us,

and courage in faith that is tested daily.

You may notice that these people in John's vision of heaven who are said to be victorious are only victorious in death.

That is the necessary step to heaven. They were killed in the great ordeal,

in the difficulties of their lives.

John's vision is viewing this event from the heavenly perspective.

He does not address what went on before that led up to their death.

That is not the issue.

But as he shares the vision, doesn't that perspective give you hope for yourself and for those who have passed on to the Church Triumphant ahead of you?

That hope resides, not in your own victory over the difficulties of this life or your death,

But in god's victory!

God wins, and He wins for you!

This great ordeal you are now living will not be the winner. God will!

You will come out of this, your great ordeal, and you will be among the saints gathered at the throne of God

crying out with the multitudes, the angels, elders and creatures;

Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb!...Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen!

In your baptism you have been given the promise of eternal life. You have been washed by the blood of the Lamb Jesus Christ, and His death.

You and your loved ones will wear the white garment and wave the palms of victory in heaven.

For those of you who have witnessed a baptism, or may have been at an age when you were baptized, that allows you to remember, you recall these words:

“...child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.”

What John reveals to us in this vision is the fulfillment of that promise.

You will gather around the throne of God made visible on this earth as you come to receive Holy Communion.

In the bread and wine you will receive the body and blood of the Lamb who was slain.

Here you are gathered with all the angels, the multitude of saints.

You connection is renewed with

those you remember in your hearts,

those whose names you have written in the book of names up here on the table,

those you love even when all you have left is a memory.

You are all gathered here giving thanks to God for life, now and in the Church Triumphant.