

Week of All Saints

First recite the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the weekly section of the Small Catechism. Then read the Proper and assigned Scripture reading followed by the devotion. Conclude with singing the hymn of the week.



Weekly Catechism section: *Fourth Petition (LSB 325)*

Hymn of the Week: *Behold A Host, Arrayed in White (TLH 656)*

Monday - Introit (Revelation 7:14; Psalm 31:1, 3, 5)

Read Psalm 31.

To wash your robe and make it white in the blood of the Lamb is nothing other than baptism. To baptize is just one Greek word meaning to wash. St. Paul clearly teaches in Romans 6 and Colossians 2 that we are buried with Christ through baptism into death. We are crucified with Christ in baptism. Christ's death is united to us in baptism. This means that we are washed with the very blood of Jesus when the waters of baptism pour over us and the Word of God is spoken. These are they who came out of the great tribulation. These are they who have been set apart as God's people by the washing of Christ's blood, which took away their sins.

Our *Introit* begins with these words from Revelation. The angel shows John the saints in heaven who have been saved from sin and death through the blood of Christ. But then our *Introit* continues with the words of Psalm 31. These are the words of the saints still on earth. "In you, O Lord, do I take refuge. Let me not be put to shame. In your righteousness deliver me." While the saints in heaven rejoice in God who saved them we continue to trust in that same God who promises us the same salvation. He delivers us by his righteousness, the same righteousness that delivered them. This is the righteousness of Christ, the only begotten Son of God. He was obedient unto death in place of every sinner. By this righteousness God has delivered his saints. Just as the saints who are in heaven around the throne of God and the Lamb find all they need from him, so do we find all we need from him here on earth. He is our rock and our fortress against all danger and evil influences that would take us away from firmly trusting in him. Every saint who has ever died in Christ has had the same faith. Whether this was before Christ was born or after he ascended into heaven, every saint has the same faith in Christ. It is the faith that finds all blessings and salvation in Christ died for all sinners. And this faith therefore says the

same thing Jesus said in his dying breath: "Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit." And in this way we embrace the same faithful God who redeemed us all from sin and death.

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Tuesday - First Reading (Revelation 7:9-17)

Read Revelation 7.

These are they coming out of the great tribulation. The great tribulation is that spiritual bondage to sin, death, and the devil, in which all of Adam's children are born. St. Paul says that we were born children of wrath, in bondage to the devil and all the evil influences of the world (Eph 2:1-3). Only those who look through eyes of faith, having the veil taken off their faces by the blood of the Lamb (2 Cor 3:12ff), are able truly to recognize this great tribulation. Sure, unbelievers can recognize when bad things happen. They can, to an extent, recognize evil. When nations are toppled, children are murdered, and bad people get away with doing bad things, even the virtue of this world can recognize the outward wickedness.

But those who are in Christ recognize the root of the tribulation. We recognize the sin, which comes from the heart of every child born of Adam, and the bondage by which it binds those who try to gain God's favor by their own efforts. We don't simply see the outward conflict, but the deep corruption, which grieved God during the time of Noah and continues to battle against the Spirit who has been given to us (Gal 5:17). Through faith we recognize our enemy the devil for what he is: a raging lion seeking to devour us. But through faith in Christ, we resist him (1 Pet 5:8ff), having been baptized into Christ, washing our robes in his own blood and buried with him into death (Rom 6:3ff). We have died to all sin and all evil influences of the devil. And we continue to die everyday (1 Cor 15:31) as we pass through this vale of tears. Jesus took on our own tribulation, or own bondage to sin, when he bore the wrath of God in our place. So by his blood, we are sanctified, set apart as God's people. Because of the trial he bore on the cross, he has satisfied his saints who hunger for his Word (Heb 10:14), he has comforted those who mourn, and he has given to poor sinners his Kingdom. So while you endure hardships, may you always recognize the real tribulation hidden underneath it. You must continue to fight the good fight of faith, battling temptation and every evil force of the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh. May you thereby also recognize and take refuge in God's righteous deliverance in the Lamb, Jesus Christ.

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Wednesday - Gradual (*Revelation 7:14; Psalm 84:5*)

Read Psalm 84.

Our *Gradual* includes these words from Revelation 7, already included in two other propers for All Saints Day: "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." But the *Gradual* adds these words from Psalm 84, "Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion." Here the Psalm describes those who cherish and hold sacred their route from their homes to Jerusalem during the feasts. When I was dating my wife we went to different colleges about three hours drive away. Once a month or so I would drive down to visit her. I got to know the route very well, and I grew to love every backroad and highway, since it always reminded me of visiting the girl I had fallen in love with. So in a similar way, those who find their strength in the Lord are those who long to see him. Like a bridegroom going out of his chamber waiting for his bride, or like a bride longing to see her groom, so God has bound himself to his saints in love. Because they find their strength in the one who washes them clean, it follows that they love him. And they love him so much that they take comfort in whatever afflictions they must suffer in this life, since they know that God has sent them for their good. They look fondly upon their journey, no matter how bad the weather, because they know that the end of it is eternal rest and peace with God and the Lamb who wipes away every tear from their eyes.

Saints are those who find their only refuge from sin, death, and hell in the gospel of their Savior. They are cleansed in their baptism by the blood of Christ who died for the sin of the world. Whoever would find his strength, life, and righteousness in worldly things is not a saint. But the saints' strength is not in carnal works and treasures. It is in the Lord who saves them. So if they find their strength, life, and righteousness in the Lord, then it follows that they long to see him. In their hearts they treasure the drive to church to hear his Word and receive his Sacrament. They cherish the Word of God and anything that leads them to that Word, whether it is their parents, their spouse, children, friends, or fellow saints. May God grant us to treasure in our hearts the highways to Zion.

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Thursday - Epistle (*1 John 3:1-3*)

Read 1 John 3.

There is no greater love than to be declared a child of God. There is no

greater price that cost anyone than that which God spent to claim us as his children. In our Epistle lesson, John is marveling at this love. And he invites us to marvel at it as well, because it surpasses all understanding. This is why John continues by saying that therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know him. Such love of God surpasses the understanding of the world. Paul calls this the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge (Eph 3:19). We cannot expect the world to recognize this love. And yet, people know that we are Christ's disciples if we have love for one another (John 13:25).

How can this be? If this love we share from the Father is unknown to the world, then how can people recognize us as Christ's disciples by witnessing such love among us? Jesus does not say that they will embrace this love. He simply says that they will recognize us by how we love one another. They will often despise us for such love, because this love is tied to our confession of the gospel. So we can be pegged as too close-knit, not doing enough to make the world a better place, and too devoted to what we believe. If our charity services provided to those in need in our towns and neighborhoods are done to get the world to recognize us and appreciate us, then they are losing sight of what actually identifies us as God's children. The greatest works will be hidden from the eyes of the wise. As long as the world cannot see their need for God's Son who died for the sin of the world, then they won't adore the love by which he claims us as his children and gives us a common confession. So it is enough for now that we have the hope of Christ, being purified from the world's influence, set apart from the ungodly, and share with our fellow saints the love we know in the gospel of Christ. Our hope is not to be seen as great before the world. It is to see Christ as he is, even as we hope for this day of the resurrection when we will be conformed perfectly to him. We can't expect the world to understand this love from our Father apart from faith in Christ. So we wait as God's children for God to reveal what carnal eyes cannot see.

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Friday - Alleluia Verse (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Read Hebrews 12.

All Saints Day is an encouraging day. It is not a day for us to invoke the saints for their assistance, as if we should depend on any other merits than those of Christ. Instead, this is a day for us to consider the great cloud of witnesses, which have gone before us. And we should take courage in knowing that we are not alone. This is what we sing in our

Alleluia verse, taken from Hebrews 12:1-2. The full quote from Hebrews 12 is as follows: "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." This is such a wonderful passage to consider right after Reformation Day. We take courage to persevere in our earthly pilgrimage as we consider the faithful who have gone before us. But we are able to conquer by looking to Jesus. He is the author and finisher, the founder and perfecter of our faith. Our faith does not come from our decision. Nor is our faith perfected by our works. Instead, our faith is grounded fully in Christ and what he did. He bore the cross, not consider the shame to be a deterrent to what he was setting out to do, because he knew the joy of our salvation by his resurrection that was set before him.

So here we find in our Lord not only the grounding of our faith, the full righteousness of Jesus to stand before God forgiven and acquitted of all sin, but also a great example of suffering and patience. We learn from Christ to look forward to what God promises to give us. And all the while, we have the example of all of those who are in Christ. Many make the mistake of relying on the merits of the saints. Instead, we should rely only on the merits of Christ as we learn from the example of the saints to do just that. It is then that we find the strength not to be burdened with sin and guilt, but to stand firm with all the saints in the true confession of our Lord Jesus. We are not alone.

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Saturday - Gospel (Matthew 5:1-12)

Read Matthew 5.

The gospel is always relevant to our lives, because every trouble in life is a consequence of sin, and the gospel is the forgiveness of sins. When Christ says, "Rejoice!" or "Don't Weep!" it is always relevant, because behind these words is his own deep compassion by which he bore our sins in his own body, paying what we owed. This is the gospel. This is what makes sinners into saints by replacing their guilt and sadness with the righteousness and joy of Christ. The gospel is not

mere head knowledge. It is the revelation of God's righteousness received through faith. We therefore live by it (Rom 1:16-17). This means that the gospel applies to us in our concrete situations. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Jesus is not here stating some mere theory or opinion. He is not telling you how to earn his blessings. He is rather comforting those who won't be comforted by anything else. He is meeting them in their real pain and mourning, and he is blessing them. He addresses those who boast in nothing of their own and he promises them the earth. He meets those who long to be freed from their sins, and he satisfies them with his own righteousness. He speaks directly to those who desire mercy, and he gives them what they desire. He doesn't assume that those whose hearts have been cleansed by faith don't still need to be nurtured by his Word; so he strengthens them with his promise that they will see God. He comforts those who lament discord and desire peace with the promise of their heavenly Father. And to those who are hated for speaking his truth, he promises joy beyond measure.

The gospel applies to our situations in life. God saves us through faith apart from works. But he always saves us within the context of our lives and hardships. He saves women in their vocation as mothers (1 Tim 2:14). He comforts widows in their distress. He is the Father to the fatherless. He counts every tear and collects them in a bottle (Ps. 56:8). He considers every labor, every loss, every anguish and affliction, every sigh, and he saves those who are crushed in heart (Ps. 34:18). He constantly proves that his gospel is relevant.

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Behold A Host, Arrayed in White

1. Behold a host, arrayed in white,
Like thousand snow-clad mountains bright,
With palms they stand. Who is this band
Before the throne of light?
Lo, these are they of glorious fame
Who from the great affliction came
And in the flood of Jesus' blood
Are cleansed from guilt and blame.
Now gathered in the holy place,
Their voices they in worship raise,
Their anthems swell where God doth dwell,
Mid angels' songs of praise.

2. Despised and scorned, they sojourned here;
But now, how glorious they appear!
Those martyrs stand a priestly band,
God's throne forever near.
So oft, in troubled days gone by,
In anguish they would weep and sigh,
At home above the God of Love
For aye their tears shall dry.
They now enjoy their Sabbath rest,
The paschal banquet of the blest;
The Lamb, their Lord, at festal board
Himself is Host and Guest.

3. Then hail, ye mighty legions, yea,
All hail! Now safe and blest for aye,
And praise the Lord, who with His Word
Sustained you on the way.
Ye did the joys of earth disdain,
Ye toiled and sowed in tears and pain.
Farewell, now bring your sheaves and sing
Salvation's glad refrain.
Swing high your palms, lift up your song,
Yea, make it myriad voices strong,
Eternally shall praise to Thee,
God, and the Lamb belong.