

Sermon for the First Sunday after All Saints' Day: November 3, 2013  
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The Apostle Saint Paul wrote at length about the resurrection of the dead to Christians who lived in two Greek cities: Corinth and Thessalonica. These Corinthians and Thessalonians struggled with many problems that he had to address, but he really needed to spend significant time on the assurance of those last two things that we already mentioned when we confessed the creed, namely the gift of a totally renewed, resurrected physical body at the end of time and the life of the world to come. These Greeks seemed to have been totally convinced that when it comes to the parts that make up a human being, only the spirit was good and the body was all bad. To be clear, they didn't believe that the body was a good thing that had been corrupted by sin, like the Bible teaches, but rather it was just because a body is a flesh-and-blood body, that's why they thought that it was bad, and that Greek thinking caused them trouble.

Though it may sound strange to you hearing it said like that, Greek thinking is nevertheless coming back in the forms of New Age and other falsely "spiritual" talk that comes from very influential people and TV shows. Greek thinking especially led these infant-like Christians to worry and wonder about their beloved ones who had died. They didn't know what was going to happen to them. Would they roam around as disembodied spirits? Would they haunt the places where they used to live or where they had died? Could I have any connection with my loved ones anymore, or would I ever see them again? And people catch themselves wondering those

very same Greek-thinking things to this day.

Which is why we need all the more the comfort of God's holy Word for us, because we are still here in this world, attacked by sin and death in every form, as well as everything that the devil can throw at us in his attempt to shake our faith. You almost begrudge those who have already died due to the fact that they don't have to deal anymore with the problems, economies, wars, and frustrations that plague us each and every day. Beware when such an attitude comes over you, because that means you might be falling for Greek thinking, which is one of Satan's sneaky, smart-sounding ways he uses even today in 21<sup>st</sup> century America to introduce doubt and sabotage your assurance of eternal life.

To be sure, those saints who have died and gone before us certainly are rid of this world and all the effects of sin forevermore. Thanks be to God, for giving that kind of relief that most of them really needed on the day when they entered the Savior's embrace. But to rid yourself of the flesh is not the only benefit that is granted to our dearly departed saints. Far from it! And because our grasp of heavenly glory comes far too short when we ponder such mysteries with earthly minds, the Holy Spirit allowed St. John the Divine to write down the vision that was revealed to him in Revelation. In Revelation 7 there was a specific panorama described in vivid and symbolic picture-language that our Lord

meant to comfort you who mourn, as Jesus promised in the Sermon on the Mount.

This vision in Revelation depicts the multitude of believers, saved by the Blood of Christ, and “coming out” of the great tribulation, rejoicing in what these faithful saints have left behind in our sin-sick world. There is no more hunger, thirst, or scorching sun, and all tears are wiped away by God's gracious hand. What is behind is past. The rest is what lies before all the saints, who from their labors rest, and remains the inheritance promised to all you saints still feebly struggling here on earth. It may seem like an impossible scene to take in, but this is what is really going on in the presence of God and you are going to get your chance to see it someday. The persecution, hostility to God's Word, broken families, problems and trials that occupy your life now are transformed into the source of your greatest joy. That's what Jesus is getting at when He says, “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.”

That's not to say your suffering now somehow builds up some account of credits that you'll benefit from later. Rather, your reward is the inheritance that Jesus earned for you, just as He did also for those long-ago heroes of the Faith, and your dearly departed loved ones, whom we will remember at the end of this church year. You did nothing to deserve this our Lord's kingdom, and if God the Father had ever looked at your sins instead of looking at His Son standing in your place, you wouldn't have gotten one answer to your prayers for His mercy. But instead, you and all believers from every tribe, tongue,

people and nation, are clothed not in the filthy garments of your sins, but in robes washed clean and white through baptism in Lamb's blood, namely, the Blood of Christ. You and the rest of the innumerable company of heaven wave your palm branches, not only to reenact Palm Sunday, but to proclaim the victorious procession of Jesus your Lord and King, who rides no more in lowliness on a donkey, but is seen parading in Holy Glory towards His rightful throne.

And lest you be discouraged by Greek thinking, your flesh will also be given back to you, upon the reappearing of Jesus on the Last Day. Most importantly, there will be no sign of sin nor of the effects of death and a fallen world, like that which plagues your bodies right now. John assures us of two things in the Epistle: first, that we shall see Christ as He is, no longer hidden in the lowly things and in suffering, and second, that we shall be like Him, purified in body as well as in soul, just as Jesus is pure in body and in soul. Did you hear that, you Greeks? Your body, by grace alone, is pure and clean and good too! Your soul will never wander in despair! You and your loved ones whom you can't see for now will never leave the loving arms of God!

Blessed are you, Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount. Because all these things, not only the relief from the bad stuff, but the inheritance of all God's “good stuff” too, belong to you by faith. He isn't demanding anything or placing any further burden on you; rather, He is offering a blessed life, bestowing His kingdom for which you pray in the Lord's Prayer, Thy Kingdom Come, which Luther taught you is none other than

the gift of the Holy Spirit to believe His Word and lead a godly life by grace, and not by reason nor by your personal strength. Your sins, no matter how great they may have been, have no power to take that blessing away from you.

All that needs to happen is for you to realize your poverty in spirit, that you give up on relying on your self and depend completely on Your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for everything, and the kingdom of heaven is yours! Be merciful to those who have sinned against you because through the death of your Savior, God has forgiven your trespasses. Feel free to mourn your loved ones because the promise of Divine comfort belongs to you as a certainty. Don't haughtily assume that you are owed anything, and in the end you'll be bequeathed everything! Jesus came only for sinners, the poor and needy. That is to say, He came for you, for all saints who died believing in Him, and for the faithful departed for whom you mourn. All the "Blesseds" of Jesus' Words in the Gospel are your precious possessions.

And when the reality of Christ's resurrection from the dead becomes a reality for you and all saints on Judgment Day, the temptation toward Greek thinking will fade in your mind like a bad dream. You will see what kind of love the Father has given to you, that you should be called children of God. The kingdom of heaven that is already yours will be opened up in full blessing as you approach the altar of Holy Communion, and in full glory at the time when you in your white robe wave your palm branch along with the multitude at the promised appearance of the Son of

Man who will come to take His seat on the throne of God.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.