

Today we celebrate All Saints Day and we give thanks to God for all the Saints who have gone before us. When we talk about Saints the Greek word *hagios* actually means 'Holy Ones' or someone who is 'set apart'. In the New Testament Saints are not those who have been conferred sainthood by the church but it refers to all believers in Christ. There are numerous letters of Paul where he addresses believers as Saints: "To all those loved by God in Rome called to be Saints: Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!" (Romans 1:7). As we celebrate the feast of All Saints today, we give thanks to God for all the believers who have gone before us and are in God's presence. We particularly remember those who have passed on the faith to us from one generation to another.

In the New Testament reading from the book of Revelation chapter-7 we are given a glimpse of what happens to the saints in the heavenly realm. John the disciple is in the island of Patmos and the Lord has been revealing several things to him through visions. Judgment had begun to fall on the world as Jesus began to open the six seals. The blood of the martyrs were crying out, "How long, Sovereign Lord, Holy and True, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" When judgment began, people were trying to flee from the wrath of God by hiding in the rocks and caves on the mountains, but was of no use. The wrath of the Lamb was upon them. This may surprise us as we look upon the Lamb as gentle, meek and mild, but Christ the Lamb of God has anger against sin. He unleashed his anger to encourage sinners to repent, but those who refuse to do so must suffer the consequences of having the Messiah crucified over and over again. Both God and Jesus join together on their anger on the sinners on that day.

Meanwhile another angel comes from the east and holds back the destructive angels who were about to harm the land and the sea. He tells them to wait until the seal of the living God is put on the foreheads of his servants. Sealing indicates ownership, protection and responsibility. Cattle were sealed with a mark to show who they belong to. Likewise in ancient times even slaves were sealed with a mark. In Ezekiel we see similar visions where God commissions an angel to put a mark on the forehead of the people of Jerusalem who groan over the horror in the city.

Likewise, here too we see that the people of God are sealed by God's angels for protection. Paul writing to the Ephesians tells us that we have been sealed (Ephesians 1:13). Like Ezekiel, John also intend an eschatological sealing that brings about rescue and preservation in judgment because they belong to God. All believers have been sealed by Gods Holy spirit to indicate that we belong to him and we will be protected when the wicked are punished. John was shown a huge multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language who were standing before the throne and the Lamb and were wearing white robes, holding palm branches in their hands. John is shown an international kingdom and therefore ethnic background or the languages they spoke or the regions they came from did not matter in this kingdom. The white robes were symbolic that they were cleansed and purified. The palm branches indicate victory, triumph and celebration. They were celebrating their salvation by giving thanks to God the Father and to Jesus Christ.

One of the elders then asked John who were these in white robes and where they had come from. John pleads ignorance and the elder goes on to give the explanation. He tells John that these were the people who suffered great persecution with threat to life and limb and in many cases martyrdom. They stood firm in their faith till the end. Their robes being washed in blood indicates that they appropriated the forgiveness of the sins and the salvation that Christ offered through his own sacrificial death on the cross of Calvary. Because of this they have been made holy. We live in similar times when there is antagonism to the followers of Christ. We are frequently branded as anti-nationals following a western religion. Christianity is an eastern religion and came to India long before it went to the West. People still hold on to such false ideas. There is also constant accusation that we are alluring people. Persecution of Christians in several parts of the country is a reality. The assurance for us is that though we may have to suffer, God is watching over us and assures us for our eternal safety.

The reward for their suffering and persecution and the acceptance of Christ's sacrifice on the cross was the gift of enjoying Gods presence continuously. It will be a place with no suffering and Jesus will be our good shepherd wiping away our tears. As believers or saints we are called to stand firm in our faith till the end knowing the riches of his grace that is in store for us. May God help one of us to remain faithful to the end.

Shalom,

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