Sermon for November 1st, 2026
ALL SAINTS DAY

READINGS

Revelation 7:9-17

9 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, **10** and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" **11** And all the angels were standing 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** saying, "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, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" **14** I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "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.

Psalm 149

1 Praise the LORD!
Sing to the LORD a new song,
his praise in the assembly of the godly!
2 Let Israel be glad in his Maker;
let the children of Zion rejoice in their King!
3 Let them praise his name with dancing,
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!
4 For the LORD takes pleasure in his people;
he adorns the humble with salvation.
5 Let the godly exult in glory;
let them sing for joy on their beds.
6 Let the high praises of God be in their throats
and two-edged swords in their hands,
7 to execute vengeance on the nations
and punishments on the peoples,
8 to bind their kings with chains
and their nobles with fetters of iron,
9 to execute on them the judgment written!
This is honor for all his godly ones.
Praise the LORD!

1 John 3:1-3

1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. **2** Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. **3** And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

Matthew 5:1-12

1 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.
2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:
3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
5 "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. **12** Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Our text for meditation this All Saints' Day is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

Every family has its own customs and traditions. Sometimes these are aligned with the broader culture around them: the Japanese man typically takes off his shoes as soon as he gets home, the American celebrates the Fourth of July, the Englishman enjoys a good cup of tea. Other times, these family customs are special only to that family, something that reflects their experiences and values. For four generations in my family, everyone pitches in to get a BB gun for every new child. Now, they couldn't *play* with it until they were much older, but nonetheless the tradition was observed on the day each child was born. Why do we do it? Because my great-great grandfather came to America and loved how the country embraced firearms – something he could not enjoy in his birthplace. So he resolved to have every one of his descendants have something to remind them of him, and to teach them a similar love for the right to bear arms. It never made much sense for our neighbors, and occasionally we would get teased for it (who gives a BB gun to a baby?), but nonetheless that is just how we are.

In our reading for today, St. John marvels that believers are made part of *God's* family, and quickly recognizes that everything changes for us because of that. To be adopted into the Divine family means being destined for a future glory that we cannot even begin to comprehend... but it also means adopting the ways of this family, ways and beliefs that are radically different from the way the world works.

Not in the Family

St. John says that we are children of God. In so doing he splits the entirety of mankind along a single fault line, between those who are children of God and those who are not. Whosoever believes in Jesus and trusts in Him for their eternal salvation, these are the children of God. The great heap of humanity which goes off into perdition – these are not the children of God. The latter camp is damned, and they are damned precisely because they did not want to be part of the family. Refusing the free offer of salvation, they shall be told "Not Mine" at Judgment Day and tossed into the lake of fire.

We cannot understand St. John's message here without that recognition, that if there *is* a family of God then there are those who do not belong to it, and this is by their choice. And why would they

choose such a fate? Because for every prodigal son who returns,[1] there are thousands of others who prefer to stay in their degenerate lives of sin. Perhaps you'll find the occasional militant nonbeliever who hates our Heavenly Father for one garbage reason or another, but for the most part it is simply a love for their favorite sin. They laze about, enjoying their fornication, petty theft, drug abuse, violence, idolatry and deceit all because it *feels good* to do those things, and they choose to feel good in the moment rather than repent and follow our Lord.

This mass of nonbelievers is known as the world, the second great enemy of the Christian.[2] The world attacks and assails us because it does not know our Heavenly Father, His ways or His salvation. When they hear of it they reject it because they want their sin instead of His righteousness. So great is their alienation from Him that even though they know He exists, they have become ignorant of who the true God is and what He wants from mankind.

In the Family

St. John says that we are the children of God. When he says this, he means it. We are not just *called* the children of God, but he says "so we are" to emphasize that this is a *real* adoption. If someone is adopted into the family, then they are going to have full participation in family affairs and they will receive an inheritance. As St. John wrote this in the first century, this was a shocking thing to learn. The Apostle grew up hearing that there are servants, slaves, friends and family; servants, slaves and friends did not inherit anything, just family. But as he grew up, his rabbis taught him that only the jews had this inheritance from God, being adopted by Him at the Exodus;[3] Gentiles were refused any sort of entry or promise of grace. But then, as Christ went to the Cross for everyone and fulfilled the Law, the *true* adoption as sons of God was revealed.[4] Now, not only are we *called* the children of God, but we are made heirs in His household.

You may ask then, what is the inheritance we receive? The Apostle is quick to tell us that this hasn't fully been revealed yet. All we know is that we will be like our Lord: not that we shall be gods ourselves, but rather that we will be made more like our Creator. He is eternal, unchanging and infinitely righteous: we shall be immortal, eternally happy and finally without sin. Our inheritance is to be resurrected unto this state, receiving our bodies back on the final day. The mystery that St. John refers to then is that we don't know exactly what life will be like, or what that will look like in practice. No need to farm for our food, no need for war, no striving for moral improvement, no doctors – what could life possibly look like without death being an ever-present possibility? Ah, but just as we do not know what our inheritance is until a family member gives it to us, we shall simply have to wait.

Living as Part of the Family

St. John says that we are children of God. When a child grows and reaches maturity, they are not independent even if they are self-sufficient. Before an inheritance is received, the child is like a servant. They must honor the wishes and commands of their Father and be a respectable member of the family, that their inheritance may be received with joy rather than shame. So St. John says that we who have been called the children of God must purify ourselves.

What does this purification consist of? Does it mean we must embrace ascetic practices like night vigils, fasts, celibacy or wearing hairshirts? No my friends: though such things *look* like they purify the self, but they "are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh" as St. Paul teaches.[5] Rather the purification that St. John speaks of is found in going to *God* for our purification. In 1 John, we are taught that confessing our sins unto our Lord brings us cleansing from all unrighteousness.[6]

1 Luke 15:11-31
2 The other two being the flesh and the devil.
3 St. John's contemporary St. Paul recounts this teaching, which he was familiar with as well, in Romans 9:4.
4 Galatians 4:1-4
5 Colossians 2:20-23
6 1 John 1:8-9

Elsewhere in Scripture the emphasis is placed on a clean conscience and sincere faith, those matters which are conferred to us in Baptism, heard in Absolution and strengthened at the Sacrament of the Altar.[7] To purify ourselves then is nothing less than to go to our Lord to receive the means of Grace, that we may be made honorable heirs living in His household. Then, having a clean conscience, we are strengthened to obey His commandments and observe His ways, treating one another with love from a sincere heart.

Conclusion

This my friends is the way that our Lord runs His family. It is foreign to the world, which subsists on a dog-eat-dog, survival of the fittest mindset. For the world, full of nonbelievers addicted to their favorite sins, one has to earn and scrape and steal and brag to get anything approaching respect from their fellow man, and even then there is nothing but enmity from the envious. But *our* household, the house of faith and Body of Christ, ought to have none of these tragedies. Instead, God grants us life everlasting and an eternal brotherhood as our inheritance, one which lacks the curses of man upon man. Let us then, with the same enthusiasm and profound joy as St. John has, rejoice in the great things to come.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

7 1 Timothy 1:5, 1 Peter 3:21, Matthew 26:26-29