

People of God, This past Tuesday was All Saints Day. We celebrate and observe that day today. And for my sermon, I would like to do something I have never done before, and base my sermon off of the text of the Hymn For All the Saints.

For All the Saints is one of the greatest hymns ever written, in my opinion. It was written in 1864 by Anglican Bishop William Walsham How, and it was put to the stirring tune that we use today by Ralph Vaughn Williams in 1906. The hymn is written as a prayer to God, and in it the Good Bishop takes us on a journey. We begin in Heaven, considering the Church Triumphant.

The Church Triumphant refers to all those Christians who have died and gone to Heaven. They have fought the good fight and now we are to consider the outcome of their way of life and we are called upon to imitate their faith. That is what this Hymn is all about.

After we consider the Church Triumphant, the hymn moves us to consider the Church Militant – that is, the church which is alive on earth and who still have at any given moment. That is us. As the Church Militant we are encouraged to press on in faith, to fight the good fight of faith, until we make it to the world to come once we die.

And then once we finish our race, once we die and leave the earthly battle behind and we enter into our rest, then we ourselves will become members of the Church Triumphant, and our children,

and grandchildren and great grandchildren and people throughout History and will look upon us and be inspired by our faithfulness and will follow in the footsteps of our faith. And so the hymn then concludes by imagining what that might be like when we ourselves get there and we graduate from the Church Militant to the Church Triumphant.

This is a very moving hymn. And its theology is captured in its music, as vss 1-3 are in Heaven, and everyone is singing the melody. Vs. 4-6 are on earth, and here the tune breaks into 4 part harmony. And. And then vss 7-8 take place in heaven again, where we all sing in unison again.

This hymn helps us to keep focus on that which is eternally significant. Every age has their own distractions which lure the people of God to sleep and try to divert us from the path, and trip us up and prevent us from running the race that is set before us, and fighting the good fight. But by considering those who have gone before us, and by considering what it will be like when we ourselves get to Heaven, that will help us to live now like the Saints of old who, Christ has called us to be like.

**1 For all the saints who from their labors rest,
who thee by faith before the world confessed,
thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.
Alleluia! Alleluia!**

Here in the first verse the writer thanks God for our fathers and mothers in the faith who went before us and who confessed faith in Jesus to the end. They now rest in Christ. After finishing his

work as the Messiah while on Earth, the Lord Jesus could say, *It is finished*. And St. Paul can say, *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day (2 Tim 4:7-8). Jesus and Paul and all the Saints declared to the world the holy and blessed name of Jesus by their words and deeds and in their deaths. The Lord told Peter by what kind of death he was to glorify God. And so the Lord Jesus tells the church that dying in the faith and holding fast to the name of Christ until the very end, that is how one conquers. This is spoken of in Revelation.

²¹ *The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.*

The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

For everyone who has been borne of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

It is in this way the saints of old entered into the joy and rest of their Master, by conquering the world by their faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and dying in Him.

**2 Thou wast their rock, their fortress, and their might;
thou, Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight;
thou, in the darkness drear, their one true light.
Alleluia! Alleluia!**

Here the hymn writer then gives us insight into how it is that the saints of old conquered. How is that they won the fight and kept their faith until the end? As I said last week, God was the refuge and strength. God was their very present help in times of trouble. He was their rock, their fortress, and might. He protected them from the storm, he gave them water to drink in that desert. And He was the one who defended them as a Mighty Fortress, and He also was the one who fought for them as their captain.

Christ was the first to lead the charge into the fray and boldly face certain death head on, teaching us to never be afraid, for not even death can separate us from the love of Christ. And although it seemed like they were surrounded by the darkness as they walked through the shadow of death, Christ was their one true light who guided them on the way. The light and hope of Christ's resurrection from the dead gives hope to all the faithful, comforting us with this, that death is resurrection, we conquer by dying in faith, and the darkness of the grave turns into the brightest light of Heaven.

3 Oh, may thy soldiers, faithful, true, and bold
fight as the saints who nobly fought of old
and win with them the victor's crown of gold.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

Then verse 3 begins to bridge the gap between the Church Triumphant and the Church Militant. The Church Triumphant, have, as their name says, triumphed in Christ, and they won the victory by dying in faith. And now they have attained their glory, honor, and everlasting reward. The hymn writer, therefore, is offering a prayer to God for those who will come have not yet died and remain in the Church Militant. He prays that we too would persevere and share in the triumph and victory of the those who have gone before.

St. Paul said, *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing.* (2 Tim 4:7-8). One of the things that helps us in our battle and fight is to look at the example of those who have gone before us, we see their outcome of their way of life and we are called to imitate their faith. *“Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.” – Heb. 13:7*

This past summer we worked to memorize Hebrews 11, the Hall of Faith, as it is called. The Bible itself gives us this example of looking to the past saints of the Bible and shows us how they did mighty

things by faith in God, and because of their faith, God received them into his heavenly kingdom.

Here we learn of the Faith of Abel, who is the first Martyr.

Then Enoch, who pleased God so much God took him to Heaven.

Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, and he built the ark and saved his household.

Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees by faith, dwelling in a foreign land in tents, looking for the Heavenly city whose author and builder is God. By faith he offered up Isaac, and by faith received him back from the dead, figuratively speaking.

By faith Moses chose to be mistreated with the people of God than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

By faith he left Egypt and kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood to ward off the Destroyer.

By faith the people crossed the Red Sea, By faith the walls of Jericho came tumbling down.

By faith Rahab the Harlot received the spies and was rewarded.

³²And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—³³who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

³⁵Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. ³⁶Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—³⁸of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

³⁹And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

In other words, as Heb. 6 says: “And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” – Heb. 6:12

This is why it is good to read about the lives of Christians who have gone before us. I encourage you to get Foxe’s Book of Martyrs, if you don’t have it. Also, pick up the two volume set Jesus Freaks, which also chronicles the stories of Christians and how they were martyred for the faith. These things will help you to be faithful, true, and bold, and fight as the saints who nobly fought of old, and win with them the victor's crown of gold. Alleluia!

**4 Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
yet all are one in thee, for all are thine.
Alleluia! Alleluia!**

Verse four now breaks into four-part harmony and takes us down to earth to where we are. It gives us a spiritual explanation as to why it is that we are to look to the saints of the past for strength to fight. And that is because, the Church Militant shares in blessed communion and fellowship with the Church Triumphant, because we are one in Christ. The body of Christ is one and so we have communion with the saints. We are not in separate compartments unconnected from the saints in heaven. No, we are one in Christ together and have communion with them.

As Hebrews 12 says – *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,* ²³ ***and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven*** (that is referring to the Saints, the church Triumphant).

Every week when we recite the Apostles' Creed we confess to believe in the Communion of Saints, and this Communion refers to the spiritual fellowship and union that all believers, past, present, and future, have in the Same Spirit and in the Same Body of Christ who is their the Head.

How does this fellowship and communion with the Saints in Heaven help us? Heb. 12 says -

Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders us and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us! (Heb 12:1-2)

It helps us to know that those who have gone before us are rooting us on and encouraging us toward faithfulness in Christ. But the Communion of Saints also encourages us in this way, as it was spoken of by Abel, through his faith, though he died, still speaks. Their life and example of faith still speaks to us, and therefore we can have a spiritual friendship, as it were, with the believers of old, by reading their words, and seeking to model their actions, and learning from their failures.

Anything beyond this could encourage us to pray to the saints who are in Heaven, a practice, I for one am not comfortable with, for Scripture does not give us permission to do that, I don't think. There is only one mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus. Therefore we do not pray to the Saints, but they are watching us. They are rooting us on. And we can certainly learn from their lives.

**5 And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
and hearts are brave again and arms are strong.
Alleluia! Alleluia!**

Verse 5 is written to further encourage the church militant who is in the midst of the fight to "still to fight on." And the chief battleground in the war for Heaven takes place in our affections and desires. For here is what happens if we are not paying attention.

The battle wages long, and we grow more dissatisfied and jaded with the world and what it offers. One would think that such dissatisfaction would encourage us to therefore seek all the more for heavenly things. But alas, our sinful hearts deceive us. And in our dissatisfaction for the things of the world, and in our impatience for heaven, we slowly find ourselves lowering our expectations of what is the good that we desire, and we then try to find it on this earth. Until at last we grope toward some lesser earthly good, finding it a tiny bit satisfying, and we confuse it, and in our halfhearted acceptance of it, we reckon it as being equal to attaining what we truly longed for in heaven.

And we begin to cling to that lesser earthly good as though it were itself the kingdom of Heaven. As Lewis once said, we are half hearted creatures who are far too easily pleased. And we can be lured away by the deceit of our hearts' desire for heaven seeking to find such satisfaction here on earth.

Thus the distant triumph song that steals on the ear is a call to place your trust NOT in the things of this world, but in Heaven. As Lewis says in his sermon *The Weight of Glory* – “*The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust it to them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing. These things – the beauty, the memory of own past – are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not thing itself; they are only the scent of*

a flower we have not found, the echo of tune we have not heard, news from a country we have not visited.”

And so, when the strife is fierce, and the warfare long, steals on the ear the distant triumph song, and hearts are brave again and arms are strong. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Do not seek find your soul's satisfaction too much on this earth. Allow your hearts desires to find its satisfaction and longing for heaven through the good things of the earth. May this world and its goodness serve as a window through which your longing for the goodness of heaven is pursued.

**6 The golden evening brightens in the west;
soon, soon to faithful warriors cometh rest;
sweet is the calm of paradise the blest.
Alleluia! Alleluia!**

Vs 6 looks toward the end of the fight, the end of one's life, referring to it as “the golden evening brightens in the west.” Westward travel is the direction not only the direction the sun goes, but it is also the direction to get back into the garden of Eden. As the sun sets in the west for the members of the church militant, and we come at last to our rest, the light strangely gets brighter, perhaps because we are getting ready to enter into paradise. Or because we travelled to life's end in the west that we have reached the utter east where the Sun rises again in Aslan's country, which is paradise the blest.

I love the Voyage of the Dawn Treader the most out of all the books in the Chronicles of Narnia. Because the main point of the book is Reepicheep's journey to Aslan's country. While King Caspian and the crew are looking for the seven missing lords, Reepicheep is looking for Aslan. He wants to live with Aslan and be in His presence forever. That is the point of the book, which is written in the form of a prophecy spoken over Reepicheep:

*"Where sky and water meet,
Where the waves grow sweet,
Doubt not Reepicheep,
To find all you seek,
There is the utter east."*

Thus, as the crew finally comes closer to world's end, they see the land beyond: so beautiful it would break your heart, Lucy says.

And Reepicheep, leaving his sword behind, sails in his little coracle over the waves of this troublesome world to Aslan's country. "...of course," says Lewis, in a letter to a friend, "anyone in our world who devotes his whole life to seeking Heaven will be *like* Reepicheep."

**7 But, lo! there breaks a yet more glorious day;
the saints triumphant rise in bright array;
the King of glory passes on his way.
Alleluia! Alleluia!**

Then verse 7, which I almost never sing, because I start crying. You have now died, and like Reepicheep, after you have spent your whole life seeking Heaven, you arrived. And you find yourself now in the Church triumphant, standing in rank and file with the all the saints, wearing bright white robes. And as you stand in the brightness of Heaven, the very Light of Light passes by, the King of Glory passes on His way, and for the first time you see him truly.

Who is this king of glory? The Lord of Hosts, He is the king of Glory. The Lord Jesus Christ passing by in Triumphal Procession, giving you what you have longed for your whole life. Where as nobody has ever been able to see the face of God and live, now you see Him as he is.

And we all, with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord will be finally transformed into the same image of Christ. *“For it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when he is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him, purifies himself, just as He is pure.”*

Incidentally, this is what the Lord Jesus meant when he said in the Beatitude, *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”* If your hope above all things is to see God, then that hope will transform you from glory to glory until at last when you do see him face to face, you will be made like Him.

**8 From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Alleluia! Alleluia!**

We have come full circle from considering the saints in heaven in the Church Triumphant, back down to the earth to the Church Militant, and then back to heaven again where we become members of the Church Triumphant. We have made our journey, we have sought the face of our king in Heaven, and we have seen the Lord of glory. And as our eyes adjust to the brightness of Heaven, the hymn bids us to take a look around. Cast your glance outward and see the magnificent procession of people from all the nations that continue to fill the halls of Heaven. Jesus said, *“And I when I be lifted from the earth will draw all men unto myself.”* (Jn 12:32)

See the amazing and glorious reward that Christ’s suffering and death procured for himself and for us. People from every tribe, language, people, and nation, all streaming into Heaven singing praise to God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Singing Alleluia, Alleluia!

People of God, We must always keep the glories of Heaven and the glory of Christ before the eyes of our hearts. We must not settle for the lesser things of earth. Keep your heart pure by maintaining an eternal and heavenly perspective on all things. Seek the face of the Christ. And in this way, you will enter into the rest of paradise the blest, and be with the Lord and All the Saints. In the name of the Father.....Amen.