

Face to Face
All Saints 2025

The Vision We Were Made For

People of God, the greatest longing of the human heart is to see God face to face and to be seen by Him. When all the endless distractions and unsolvable problems of this world are ignored—and you finally settle down to contemplate the one thing which is most needful, then you will come to know this: that your greatest desire is to see God and to be seen by God.

For only here, looking upon the glory of God in the face of Christ, and seeing the light of His face shine upon us with gladness and love, will you find the reason you have been created. As the Psalmist declares: "*Lord let your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.*" It is the blessing of all blessings that we would see the face of God smile upon us in love.

Now, while this is the benediction, there is the problem of our sin which actually prevents us in our current state from receiving the blessing of God's face smiling upon us. For the very vision of the brightness of God's countenance shining upon us would instantaneously destroy us, because of our sin.

The hiding of God's face therefore is a sign of judgment.

Deuteronomy 31:17-18 – *“Then my anger will be kindled... and I will hide my face from them.”*

Isaiah 59:2 – *“Your sins have hidden his face from you.”*

The Gospel Promise

Remember in Exodus 33 Moses asked God to see His glory. *“You cannot see my face and live”* He responded. This is the human condition. Our sin makes us incapable of the beatific vision.

So God instead allowed Moses to see His back, as He passed by Moses on the mountain. And when Moses came down from the mountain, his face glowed with the reflected glory of God, so that the Israelites couldn't even look at him, and had to put a veil over his face.

Now just imagine - if the afterglow of the glory of God's back was unbearable to sinful man, how much more the direct vision of the glory of God's face?

And yet, the same God who told Moses *“you cannot see my face and live”* also promises in the Scriptures that His saints will see His face forever. What changed?

God became Man in Christ Jesus.

St. John writes, *“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.”* *“No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.”* Glory of God veiled in the flesh of Christ so we could behold it and live.

In Christ, the image of the invisible God has been made manifest. The unbearable glory of God became bearable. He wrapped His glory in human nature so we could look upon Him without being consumed. The Incarnation is God's solution to our problem: the glory of God is veiled in flesh so we can look upon Him and live.

And more—through His death and resurrection, and the pouring out of His Spirit, He makes us capable of bearing what we could not bear before.

Ezekiel 39:29 – *“I will no longer hide my face from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel.”*

Christ is not only who we long to see, but He is also the One who makes us able to see Him. For as Paul writes, *“For the God who said Let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”*

This double work of Christ—revealing God's face and making us capable of seeing it—is what we celebrate today on All Saints Day. For the promise of seeing God's face has been fulfilled in those who have gone before us. And by remembering them, we also have the hope of the glory of God in the face of Christ being held out for us.

The Great Multitude: Purified by Blood and Fire

Listen to what John saw in Revelation 7: *"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, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"*

These are the ones who made it. These are the ones who now see God face to face. As Rev. 22:4 says of them – “They will see His face.” But how did they arrive to that lofty position to be around the throne worshiping the Lamb, seeing the face of God?

One of the elders gives us the answer—and notice, he gives us *two* elements that work together:

"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."

They came *through* the great tribulation, and they were washed *in* the blood of the Lamb. The blood of Christ's cleansing Blood, and the purification of tribulation. The cleansing and the refining. The water and the fire. Forgiveness and transformation. You cannot separate them.

The blood of the Lamb makes purification possible at all. Without it, the fires of tribulation would consume us in judgment. But because we have been washed in Christ's blood, those same fires become purifying rather than destroying. The blood covers our guilt; the tribulation burns away our dross. The blood reconciles us to God; the suffering conforms us to Christ. The blood opens the way; the tribulation prepares us to walk it.

That is why the elder says not only that they were washed in the blood, nor only that they came through tribulation—but both. These are inseparable aspects of one reality: God's love transforms us to see Him face to face, through the shedding of Christ's blood and our participation in His sufferings. Only thus can we become creatures fit to behold His glory and live.

What then is this “great tribulation”? While Revelation was written primarily to those who would suffer as martyrs in the first century, its teaching transcends all ages. For us, the great tribulation is not a distant seven-year apocalypse, but the sufferings of this present age—the afflictions every Christian must endure. “Through much tribulation,” says Paul, “we must enter the kingdom of God.”

The great tribulation, then, is every trial, temptation, and sorrow of this fallen world—the narrow way, the daily cross, the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings. It is what Paul calls our “light momentary affliction,” the refining fire of God burning away all that cannot endure His presence.

God uses tribulation not to destroy but to prepare—to make us fit for glory, able at last to behold “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

As the Lord told Ananias of Paul, “I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

We cannot look on Christ and be transformed into His image apart from sharing in His sufferings. The blood reconciles and cleanses us; the tribulation conforms and perfects us. Both flow from the same love of God in Christ, and both lead to glory.

And so the saints before the throne have received both. They came through the great tribulation—through persecution, loss, and sorrow—while all along the blood of the Lamb was cleansing them of sin. At last they emerged from the refining fire, robed in white, ready to bear the glory they were once too frail to endure.

Therefore they are now before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore. For the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And they shall see Him, face to face. As He is. Forever.

The Path of Purification – The Beatitudes

But let's not be confused. It is not just the mere suffering of tribulation that sanctifies us. It is how we respond to these tribulations, that sanctifies us. And this is how we are to understand the purpose of the Beatitudes.

The Beatitudes are not merely ethical demands. They are the blessed response of the saints on earth to the tribulations that God brings upon them. When God shakes the world, and the world rages against us, when suffering comes—*how we respond* determines whether that

tribulation purifies us and prepares us to see the face of God, or hardens us and makes our sin increase so that we do not see the face of God.

In fact, consider the Beatitudes as the way Jesus Himself responded when the world was against Him. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return. He was poor in spirit, meek, merciful, a peacemaker. He mourned over sins and death. He hungered and thirsted for righteousness. And He was pure in heart. And he was persecuted for righteousness sake. The Beatitudes are the shape of Christ-likeness—what it looks like when the blood of the Lamb is purifying a heart that is going through the great tribulation.

When tribulation strips away your pride and control, blessed are you if you respond with poverty of spirit. When you suffer loss and feel the pain of this fallen world, blessed are you if you mourn your own sins, rather than lament the sins of others against you.

When you are wronged and oppressed, blessed are you if you respond with meekness rather than vengeance. When tribulation arises, blessed are you if you hunger and thirst for righteousness rather than despair of your circumstances.

When others sin against you, blessed are you if you respond with mercy rather than bitterness.

When the world around you is warring and fighting, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

And when you are tempted to double-mindedness, to divided loyalties, blessed are you if you remain pure in heart. For here is the explicit promise: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Purity of heart and seeing God are inseparable.

Every beatitude is the blessed response to tribulation—the response of a heart purified by Christ's blood through suffering. This is how Christ responded to His passion. This is how the prophets also responded to the tribulations and persecutions of their day. And when we learn to respond the same way, we can rejoice that God is purifying our hearts, preparing us to receive the beatific vision.

Already Being Transformed

The apostle John writes: *"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."*

You are already a child of God. Right now. In the midst of your tribulation. And because you are His child, He is preparing you for what children are meant to receive—the full vision of their Father's face.

The vision itself will transform us. We shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is. The seeing and the becoming are completed in one moment. And yet, this transformation has already begun. Paul writes that we *"are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" as we behold the Lord.*

Right now you see Christ by faith—in His Word, in His Supper, in the waters of baptism, and in the creation. You see through a glass darkly. But one day you will see Him not by faith but by sight. Face to face. And in that moment of seeing, you will become like Him.

John adds, *"Everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."* The hope of seeing Christ face to face purifies the soul. When you fix your hope on the promise that you will see Him, that hope works in you, making you ready for that seeing.

This is how you endure the great tribulation—by keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus. Every trial, every tear, every moment of suffering borne in faith is forming in you the

capacity to bear the unbearable beauty of God's face. You are already practicing the beatific vision. You are training your spiritual eyes to behold now, by faith, what you will behold by sight, on that great day.

At His Table

This is what we celebrate today on All Saints Day—those who have finished the race, who have been purified through tribulation and now see Him as He is. They give us hope, because the same God who brought them through the fires of purification is at work in us right now, preparing us for that same eternal vision – so long as we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, in His Word, and Sacrament.

Here in the Eucharist you behold Christ—not yet face to face in unveiled glory, but really, truly present under the forms of bread and wine. The saints see Him directly; you see Him sacramentally, with eyes of faith. But both are real vision. Both are transformative.

And every time you come to this Table, you are being prepared for the Table above, where the Lamb in the midst of the throne shepherds us to springs of living water.

So come, all you who mourn—and receive comfort. Come, all you who hunger and thirst—and be satisfied. Come, all you poor in spirit—the kingdom of heaven is yours. Come

all you who are in need of mercy, and find mercy here. Come you pure in heart, and see your God. Come and see the Lord, that you may be transformed from one degree of glory to another, until that day when the veil is removed, our sins are finally purged away in death, and our faith becomes sight.

Let us pray:

*O Christ, whom now beneath a veil we see,
May what we thirst for soon our portion be,
To gaze on Thee unveiled, and see Thy face,
The vision of Thy glory and Thy grace.*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.