

Sermon for the Feast of All Saints

"Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?"

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'Who are these, and from where have they come?'

I will tell you where they have come.

They have come from the Church's font. They have come from the sacred water. They have come from the Altar of Sacrifice. They have come from God, *'Born not of the will of man, nor of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but of the Almighty.'*

This is the Feast of All Saints, my friends. The day upon which we celebrate the victory of all who have fallen asleep in the name of the Lord.

No one in the Church dies. No one; for the Church knows no death. For this reason, Our Lord proclaims *'she is not dead, only sleeping.'* The *'she'* spoken of here is the bride of Christ, the glorious Church, the communion of all those washed with water and the word.

You have all witnessed a Christian funeral. Many of you have had your own loved ones brought into this holy hall, this Sanctuary, to have a loved one commended to the earth.

Do you remember when you were young? When your mother prayed with you? What did she say? Kneel before your bed. Say your prayers. Get into bed. Snuggle beneath your covers. And go to sleep.

What is your funeral but a holy sleep? You are brought into this nave. Your mother the Church takes you to your room, for this simple sanctuary is your room. She prays with you. You are covered with a white pall which is to you as an infant's blanket, you rest beneath its warmth, and you go to sleep.

How many loving mothers have sung a little song to help their child pass from the waking anxieties of life into the blissful solace of sleep? So too do we sing before

the beloved body of our Christian brother or sister, a hymn to carry him from the worry of the world to the peace of paradise.

And then he sleeps. And his parents wait. For they know what he perhaps does not. That all sleep ends in wakefulness.

Why do I say this? It is because this is the Feast of All Saints. A holy feast. On this day we commemorate the endless martyrs who have shed their blood in the name of Christ. On this day we commemorate the great saints who confessed before principalities and thrones and dominions the glory of the Lord with the sword to their neck. On this day we venerate the children and slaves who would have their flesh rent apart by lions and beasts rather than renounce their Savior.

And even as all these great saints faced their bloody torture and death, what do you believe they said? A child martyr recalls the words of St. Paul when he wrote: *'By baptism we were buried with Christ into his death.'* And before the ravenous soldier she calmly informs him, 'You cannot kill me, I am already dead. I am a Christian.'

An old man is brought before a tyrant judge who will sentence him to the cross, and, recalling the words of the Our Lord, *'Take up your cross, and follow me,'* he prays: 'I shall be satisfied with your likeness O Jesus, I shall rejoice.'

A confessor of the truth of Christ's faith is thrown upon the stake to be burned alive, and meditating upon the words of Our Redeemer, *'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'* He pronounces, 'What I taught with my lips, I will seal, O Lord, with my blood.'

A Christian bishop is cast into the colosseum to be devoured by savage beasts; his only thought is the Spirit calling out from within him: 'Come to the Father.'

A Muslim was captured with 29 Egyptian Christians by Jihadist murderers, each in turn asked if they were followers of the Nazarene, and each being put to death as they said 'yes'. When the killers came to him and asked him who he worshiped, he who knew of no witness to our Lord, but the sacrificial blood shed by those who called upon his name. His confession was simple: 'Their God is my God. Their Jesus is my Jesus.'

None of these knew death, for the Church knows no death.

You read of saints who have been rent apart in horrendous ways. You have known fathers and mothers, taken by terrible diseases. You have seen brothers, sisters, children, ripped from this world before their time. Your soul cries out: 'They have died!' Christ responds, *'They are not dead, only sleeping.'*

'Beloved, we are God's children now.' And just as a little child, having slept, awakes, and cries out to be held by his or her parents; so will the last day come, and the graves be opened, and those who sleep will cry out, and God their Father shall come and lift them up, and kiss them, and bear them to the eternal mansions of unending glory as they look up to His loving face. You will see this on that day, and you will know:

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Revelation 7:9-17; 1

John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12