

Sermon for the Feast of All Saints

"See what kind of love the Father has given us."

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"The fool hath said in his heart: 'there is no God.'" For if there was a god, why would he not show himself to us? Why can't I see him?

The ancient Greek Xenophenes, a skeptic, which at the time meant someone who refused to believe anything that wasn't immediately apparent, noted that the Thracians, who were redheads, saw their gods as pale skinned and red-haired, and the Ethiopians saw their gods as dark skinned with black hair. The conclusion he drew from this is that everyone just imagines God in their own image, and determined that there just is no god, he is just a projection of what we think we look like, but in our best form.

He thought that if there was a god, he would look like something, and we would easily describe him; as if God, the being above all beings, is easily understood, is simply seen by sinful eyes.

What he did not understand is what is written in the scriptures: *'No man hath seen God at any time.'*

Many say: 'If there is a God, why can I not see him?' They think they are being godless. In reality, they are confessing the central tragedy which the Christian faith exists to answer.

For in the beginning, the Lord of All *hovered over the waters*. From the void he forged all there is, from the emptiness he called into existence all that is seen.

Yet the world he created was not a mere amusement on God's part, for he made it to be a home, a palace, for his image and likeness: Man, the crown of all creation.

And so the Lord lived in friendship with Man. *In the cool of the evening* did he walk in the garden, there to converse with Adam, there to speak to him *as a man speaks to a friend*. For to the unfallen eyes of the first man, God was in no way invisible, rather; he saw God quite easily in garden, for he saw God everywhere in everything, for the Lord *is all and in all*. For it is *in Him that we live, and move, and have our being*.

But man was deceived, taken by a lie, and believing that he would be made wise by disobeying the Lord and eating of the forbidden tree, he was made a fool, *'for the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.'* *'His eyes were opened'*, which is to say, he was made blind. No longer could he see the God who is all, at all. Now it became true of Adam and Eve, even as it is true of all those whose eyes have become evil with sin: *'No man hath seen God.'* *'For all have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God.'*

What now? The man and woman make for themselves clothing; they hide, for no longer seeing, they seek to no longer be seen. God, having become invisible to them, they seek to become invisible to God.

But what greater horror is there than to become invisible to him who sees all? If one is not seen by him who is all-seeing, what can one conclude, but that one has died? That one has ceased to exist in any true sense?

So absolute terror grasps the hearts of our first parents when *the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, 'where art thou?'*

For then, they knew what God had spoken was true: *'On the day thou eatest of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt surely die.'*

For before the eyes of the Lord, they had died; even as those in the grave are to us invisible, so now man had entered the grave in disobedience, and become hidden to the God of all.

Yet remember, God would not remain hidden forever, for how could the lover of mankind remain apart from his beloved? Even in his hiddenness, he prepares himself to be seen by man, whose greatest joy is to once again enter into that garden; to once again see God, the purpose and end of all man's desire.

You and I do not think of what infinite pleasure it will be to see our God, for we

are blind. But remember that great Saint, Job, who in the midst of all his suffering, had but one desire: *'That I might see God face to face.'*

Remember how after being excoriated by the Most High for daring to question the designs and plans of the Almighty, Job repents in ecstasy, declaring: *'I heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.'*

Remember that final prayer of Moses, that he might see his Lord. Remember to him what unutterable happiness it was to see what is referred to by the divine oracles as *'the passing of Lord's glorious presence.'*

Remember the name given to father of all God's chosen people, *Israel*, which both means *He who struggles with God* and *He who shall see God*. For in this name is the promise of our final redemption.

For we who now struggle in this life are counted among Israel, as among they who shall see God.

And indeed we do see God, for we bear witness to the one who was made flesh. We bear witness to the invisible made visible again; to the healing of our blindness; to the glory of the Lord. For have we not all gathered here to see Our Lord? In his body you will touch Him, in His blood you will taste his sacrificial love. [You will see Him].

Today is the Feast of All Saints. Throughout the year, there are commemorations on the Church Calendar for a multitude of men called saints: St. Ignatius, St. Peter, St. James, St. Stephen, the Holy Innocents. When we speak of a saint in this way, we mean 'martyr.' A martyr is a witness, one who has *seen God*, who has borne witness to his death and resurrection, to the salvation wrought by Christ.

'No man may see God and live.' And so those martyrs who bear witness to the glory and love of the Lord were put to death by sinful men. This *'great cloud of witnesses'*, is what we rejoice in on this day; those who have seen God, and died, yet in their death, they have gained everlasting joy, even as it is written: *'To live is Christ, to die is gain.'*

They that have died for the name of Christ have inherited the vision of Christ, what the Church has called the Beatific Vision, the sight of the uncreated God, the highest pleasure and most unspeakable joy which our being so deeply longs for.

And you too, dear Christian, by virtue of your baptism, by virtue of your union with the body of the Lord in this most Holy Supper; you too shall be counted among that *great cloud of witnesses*.

‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,’ that he might, by his incarnation, again look upon his people in compassion and pity; that he might have his body punished and his blood poured to *cleanse you of all unrighteousness*.

But why?

That your ancient blindness might be undone, that your wicked heart might be cleansed. For purged of evil, and having been *made whiter than snow*, your eyes might be closed to *good and evil*, and again opened to God alone. ‘*See what kind of love the Father has given us*’, see that Beatific Vision, which will be for you a joy beyond all imagining; as seeing again a long lost and deeply loved friend, as receiving back a beloved son once thought dead, as returning to your homeland after a long exile. For Our Lord has spoken it, it cannot be but true:

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

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Revelation 7:9-17; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12.