

## All Saints' Day 2015 – Revelation 21:1-6

The best stories are those that keep you on edge because you're not sure how they will end.

The Bible, God's story, is the story of all things; a story that when read from beginning to end leaves the honest hearer wondering: "how will this end?" It has so many twists and turns, so many dead ends, so many times that God's purpose seems thwarted by mankind, by the kingdoms of the earth, by the forces of sin, death and the devil that one can hardly imagine how the Lord will pull this one right, how Israel, how mankind so bent on destroying itself and rebelling against God will ever be rescued from falling into the deepest darkest pit forever.

Our own lives, and our own world, seem to prompt the same questions: how will this end?

Yet, here in the book of Revelation, with only a few lines left in Holy Scripture, St. John passes on a brief, but quite spectacularly glorious snapshot of the end – the world's end, your end, my end – of the story, which turns out to be not so much an end but a new, truly epic beginning. (Revelation 21:1-6)

*[1] Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.*

What happens at the end? After the Lord has fulfilled His promise to destroy all that destroys His creation and His people, all threats demolished, and as Isaiah tells us, swallows up the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread of all nations: "*He will swallow up death forever*"? (25:7) Answer: "a new heavens and a new earth".

God's plan has always been better than just for you to go to heaven when you die, as wonderful as that is; but it doesn't stop there. He intends to take this old creation, falling apart under the corruption of death and decay, chaotic and destructive, and remake it so thoroughly that it is only ever a place of life and not death, growth and not decay, thriving and not destroying.

But watch what happens next:

*[2] And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

The life of heaven comes down to earth. The Father's Kingdom comes ("Our Father") so that now only His will is done on earth as it is in heaven. The holy city, new Jerusalem – the Church, the Bride of Christ – comes down "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband". Not shabby, not divided, not weighed down by guilt and shame, not dirty with sin, not diseased and fragmented as Christ's Church seems on earth now, but clean, prepared, ready.

These are the saints whom we remember today, and to whom we belong; we who have been washed in Holy Baptism and who continue in the faith once given to the saints. Saints are holy, not because of their own achievements and works, but because of what God has made them by giving His Son to them and filling them with His Holy Spirit. Note: the city comes down from heaven to earth, not from earth. That is, our salvation, our sanctification, is a work of God, not the result of our own achievements!

*[3] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."*

There is perhaps no more beautiful passage in all of Scripture. That which God promised to Israel, that which He promised in Christ to all who are baptized and believe, that which the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm so marvelously lays out in our minds – God as Shepherd who is continually with us, in whose house believers dwell forever – comes to dwell with us forever. "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man." Are there any more comforting words in all the universe, to know that He who has already come to dwell with us in by the Means of His Holy Word and His blessed Sacraments, will truly make His dwelling place among us? And, why? Why does the God of the universe, so holy and pure, so mighty and grand, so far exalted above us children of dust who in our own minds exalt ourselves above Him daily, even hourly? Why? It's too unbelievable. Indeed, how much easier it is to believe that God could become man, live, die and rise from the dead than it is to believe that God would even want to make His final and ultimate and forever home with us worms!

But, here it is, and it is written here that you may know it is true, and that it will happen, and God means it to happen so much that He will let nothing separate you from Him, not even death and decay; that on that Last Day He will do to you what He did to the dead and rotting corpse of Lazarus: He will speak your name, and all the cells of your body that have dissolved into the earth, all the atoms of your skin that have fallen away into the soil and into the sea and into even the parts of plants, will come back together, rise and be made new. Why? So that He may be with you, and me, unworthy and ungrateful sinners who are now already made saints by His Means of Grace.

*[4] He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."*

All the stain and scars of loss, the things done by us and the things done to us that weight so deeply upon us are wiped away from us.

*[5] And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."*

Note: "I ***am*** making all things new". That begins now. Though we will not know the fullness of Christ and His resurrection until He raises us up on that last day with resurrected bodies, that new creation has begun in us now. The same Spirit whom Christ will breathe into the dead bodies of the saints to make them stand up is operating among us today, has given new hearts and minds to His people through the Word preached and Sacraments administered, and is busy remaking us from the inside out.