

Mount Olive Lutheran Church  
5327 W. Washington Blvd.  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208-1798

All Saints' Sunday  
November 4, 2007  
1 John 3:1-3

*"Children of the Lamb"*  
by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

### Introduction

Our new hymnal presents us with a different reading this morning as part of our observance of All Saints' Sunday. It is the epistle which comes from the first letter of St. John and as such it provides us with a portion of the theme for this morning. Way back in my memory is the thought that I wrote a sermon on these words when I was in my first year at the seminary, but I could not find it in my files, and being 33 years ago it might not necessarily have been all that useful. It would have been interesting to see however.

In any event, the words of the Apostle John are good words to use as a basis for our meditation on this All Saints' Sunday. It is of note that none of the lessons for today uses the word saint, but in a very real way they all describe perfectly what a saint is. May the Holy Spirit bless us as we consider the theme: "Children of the Lamb"

### I. Children

All Saints' Day has a long and interesting history in the church. The abuses that came to be associated with it in the selling of indulgences and the viewing of relics led in large part to Martin Luther's posting of the 95 Theses on the church door at Wittenberg on the eve of All Saints. But the fact that there are saints is indisputable from the teaching of the Scripture. As we confess in the Apostles' Creed—I believe in the holy Christian church, the communion of saints.

But the apostle in our text for today uses a quite different word to describe a saint. Listen to the opening words of our text: See what kind of love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and so we are. Children—what an interesting term to use in our relationship with God. And what a fitting word to use to describe the saints. Now some might be put back a little by this thought. They might not want to think of themselves as a child. It is not a word to show strength and maturity and power. It is not a word to describe the CEO of a Fortune 500 company. Exactly. It is a word of dependency and need as well as a word of trust in a loving father. As Jesus said, "whoever does not receive the kingdom of heaven like a child will not enter it." Our dependence is on God, especially on the Father's love by which we are called his children.

If we look at the words of the Gospel lesson for today in this light we might understand a little more clearly the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. The beatitudes are a description of the saints in this life. Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the

meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. All those "blesseds" for those whom the Lord knows and loves and who live as his children. When John in our text says, "The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him", it is more than just a hint of the opposition of the world to the life of the saints. So Jesus says in the closing words of the Gospel, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

So the life of a saint may not be at all easy as the world would see it. There are challenges and sorrows, there may even be persecution. But the life of a child of God is one where the Lord makes us his own and purifies us. As the closing verse of our text reminds us: "And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure." Here is a great description of a saint without using the word. Those who are purified in Him who was without sin and who became sin for us. For the saints are those who are washed pure in the waters of Holy Baptism, who hear his life giving and life changing Word, who receive the body and blood of His Son in the Sacrament of the altar for the forgiveness of sins.

So it is very appropriate that our opening hymn this day spoke of the church and in so doing reminded us of our place as the people of God and the saints of God.

Church of God, elect and glorious  
Be the people he intends  
Strong in faith and swift to answer  
Each command your Master sends;  
Royal priests, fulfill your calling  
Through your sacrifice and prayer  
Give your lives in joyful service—  
Sing his praise, his love declare.

## II. Hope as Children of the Lamb

But there can be no denying that there is another dimension to understanding the word saint as we consider it this day. And that is in the hope of glory. Often when we use the term saint or saintly we are using it to refer to someone who has gone before us. So in this service we will remember the faithful departed from our congregation. We understand the hope that is referred to in our text: "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." There in simple childlike words is a description of our hope. What a blessed thought that we will be like him and we will see him as he is. In Christ is indeed our hope of glory, the hope of the saints.

And this picture of hope is given much more brilliantly in the words of the first lesson for

today. John sees the vision of the multitude in white. A number so great that no one can count. Of every nation, tribe, people and language. And they stand before the throne of God and before the Lamb. They sing the song of victory: "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb!" They have conquered. They have come out of the great tribulation. Their robes are washed in the blood of the Lamb and he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Here is the triumph of the saints and the glory of salvation. The Lord will bring his children home.

The trials and difficulties of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For we shall be like him and we shall see him as he is. And so the images come together. We are the saints of God. We are the children of God. We are the children of the Lamb.

Grant us grace to see thee, Lord  
Present in thy Holy Word  
Grace to imitate thee now  
And be pure as pure art thou  
That we might become like Thee  
At thy great Epiphany  
And may praise thee ever blest  
God in man made manifest.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.