

All Saints' Day  
St. Matthew 5:8

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

A fact of life in this, our little congregation, is that there are very few funerals. Since I have been here, I've only buried two, though we've lost three. As is usually customary on this day in our churches, we like to commemorate our blessed dead from the past year, and thank God for the life that they were given, both here on earth and in eternity in Christ. But we have had none this past year.

So, we count all of our blessed dead among the many. And we rejoice with St. Job that, like him, they will see God. (cf. Job 19:26-27) With their own eyes they will look upon the face of God and live! Sin is gone, done away with, for the sake of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. They have all passed from this vale of tears and sorrows, from death to life, from this temporal existence to eternity.

The curse expressed by Isaiah the prophet no longer has a hold of them. Caught up in a vision of the heavenly throne room, he catches a glimpse of YHWH on His throne. He cries out, "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts." (cf. Isaiah 6:1-5) As YHWH relates through the prophet Ezekiel, no one may look upon God and live. (cf. Ezekiel 33:20)

But for these blessed dead, that is not the case. These are the pure in heart of which Jesus speaks in today's Gospel: "Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God." They are now in Christ; the Scriptures are practically silent what it is like for the dead between the time they take their last breath and the Lord Jesus Christ returns to judge the living and the dead. But what we can say for the blessed dead—those St. John was inspired to write about, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord"—is that they are in Christ. Jesus has them, and no one is able to snatch them out of His hand, and they are His for eternity. For that reason, though their bodies lie in graves or at the bottom of the sea or some other place rotting and decomposing, since they are in Christ, they are pure in heart.

Now, what does say of you, dear hearers? Can you call yourself pure in heart? What does it mean to be pure in heart? It means that your heart is pure of all sins, lusts, and evil desires.

- It means that you never curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie, or deceive by the name of God.
- It means that you never despise the Word of God.
- It means that you never despise or anger your parents or other authorities.
- It means that you never hurt or harm your neighbor in his body.
- It means that you never commit any sexually impure acts or even speak of them in any favorable fashion.
- It means that you never take your neighbor's money or possessions or come by them dishonestly.
- It means that you never tell lies about your neighbor, betray him, slander him, or harm his reputation.
- It means that you never scheme to get your neighbor's house or inheritance or come by it in a way that only *seems* right.
- It means that you never entice or force away your neighbor's wife, workers, or animals, nor turn them against him.

These are the things that the pure in heart do not do. Without a doubt, we can say that the blessed dead—all the dead, in fact—do not do these things. As far as we can tell, the dead lie in their graves and do nothing. It is only the martyr's that are shown doing anything in eternity: they are under the altar in heaven crying out, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Revelation 6:10)

Now, think back over the events of your life. Don't think too hard. Perhaps just the last year, or last month, or last week, or just the last day. Can you say, with 100% certainty and confidence that your

heart has been free from every one of these impurities? Go ahead, raise your hands if you're sure. [PAUSE] Not a one, just as I suspected. Impure sinners, the lot of you!

But, lest you begin to feel secure in what you should not do, and perhaps in a few cases in what you do not do, there are things the pure in heart are to do while still living in this vale of tears. It still means that your heart is pure of all sins, lusts, and evil desires.

- It means that you, without question, fear, love, and trust in God above all things.
- It means that you, without question, call upon God, use His name, in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.
- It means that you, without question, hold the Word of God sacred and gladly hear and learn it.
- It means that you, without question, honor, serve, obey, love, and cherish your parents and other authorities.
- It means that you, without question, help and support your neighbor in every physical need.
- It means that you, without question, lead a sexually decent life and husband and wife love and honor each other.
- It means that you, without question, help your neighbor to improve and protect his possessions and income.
- It means that you, without question, defend your neighbor in your speech, speak well of him, and always explain everything in the kindest way.
- It means that you, without question, be of help and service to your neighbor in keeping his inheritance and house.
- It means that you, without question, urge your neighbors wife, workers, and animals to stay with him and do their duty.

These are the things that the pure in heart do. Again, the blessed dead are not doing these things; it's not like they have an opportunity to do so as they now lie in their graves—in Christ—waiting for Jesus to return for the day of resurrection.

So, I implore you again to think of your own past. Have you done all of these things? Show of hands again; I can wait. [PAUSE] Not a one...once more. It is a more accurate assessment to say, in the kindest way, that you want to do these things, at least according to the law of your mind, but you find yourself not doing them and doing what you ought not to be doing instead. (cf. Romans 7:15-23)

The Law of God convicts you. We have just run through the Ten Commandments—through their explanations as Dr. Luther has taught us in his Small Catechism. Here you have been told what you ought not to be doing, and if you do not do these things, then you are “halfway” to being pure in heart. Here you have also been told what you ought to be doing, and if you do these things, then you have met the other half of being pure in heart. But you find then this law: evil is present within you. You do the things you ought not to do and do not do the things that you ought to do. By no means are you pure in heart.

What hope is there for you to be among the blessed dead at the end of your days? What hope is there for you to be in Christ as you lay in your graves?

In and of yourself, there is exactly no hope. If your pure heart depended on you, you would be lost and condemned because you cannot attain the pureness of heart required to be called blessed by Jesus in today's text.

Today is All Saints' Day. It's a day not only of celebrating those who have gone before us, but in celebrating yourselves, too. In both cases, those who have gone before us and you, sainthood is without question, and in both cases it is for the same reason. You are in Christ! It's a day of celebrating and thanking Jesus for who you are in Him.

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the

dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. (Romans 6:3-9)

Those who have gone before us, while living, could make no claim to pureness of heart on their own merits, just as you today cannot. But thanks be to God in Jesus Christ, that your pureness of heart comes to you from outside of yourself. It is given to you for the sake of your Lord Jesus Christ and His merits. For you, Jesus has gone to the cross and shed His blood as your propitiation. For you, Jesus was raised again from the dead in order to seal to you the life eternal that is yours in Him. For the sake of Jesus Christ, you are pure in heart. "For [the Father] made [Christ Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Jesus knew no sin. All of those things that the pure in heart do not do Jesus did not do. All of those things that the pure in heart do, Jesus did. Jesus still does not do those things you ought not to do. Jesus still does those things you ought to do. And He did them all and does them all for you. He is pure in heart in order to make you pure in heart. And He fulfills all righteousness by completely identifying with you, right down to your sinfulness. Gaze upon the Son of God—the very Lamb of God—hanging on the cross, bleeding and dying. There, you will see the most pure of heart person the world has ever known having become sin for you, having taken all of your sin into His flesh, and the sins of all men. There, Jesus—God in the flesh—is the most vile sinner the world has ever known. Oh, mystery beyond all understanding—the purest in heart is the grossest sinner in the world.

But mark this well, dear Baptized: Jesus, in taking every last bit of your sin into His flesh, leaves you with none. You are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:11) Oh, mystery beyond all telling, you who still now struggle with sin have no sin in your flesh for the sake of Him who took it all into His own flesh, Jesus Christ your Lord.

What does this mean? It means, dear Baptized, that you are a saint of God. It means that the Psalmist wrote of you when he sang, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints." (Psalm 116:15) It means that you are one who, remaining in Christ, will come out of the great tribulation having your robe washed in the blood of the Lamb, making them white. (cf. Revelation 7:14b) It means that you are forgiven for all of your sins, you blessed of the Lord, and you, too, will look upon the face of God like those who have gone before us with the sign of faith and live for eternity.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.