

Prayer of the Day:

Almighty God, You knit Your people together into one holy Church, the body of Christ our Lord. Grant us grace to follow the example of Your blessed saints in lives of faith and willing service and with them at last inherit the inexpressible joys you have prepared for those who love You; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple. Alleluia. (Revelation 7:15a)

Sermon Text:

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth (Revelation 1:4-5).

Read the Lesson

Dear brothers and sisters in a faith worth dying for,

As a child, a pretty usual thing happened when I would get hurt. I ran to mom. Usually, mom, because well, dads are good at a bunch of things but sympathy ... well let's just say usually, mom. I'm sure with tears in the eyes, and a bit of a whine in the voice, I would announce that I had injured myself. Okay, I was little, "Mommy, I have an ou-wee!", "Mommy, I have a boo-boo!" Or maybe it was just announced by screaming and crying without much other articulation at all. More often than not, Mom would reply, "Oh, okay, calm down, deep breaths, let me see it." After assuring me that I wasn't going to die but would probably survive this, I would typically get a band-aide, if I was lucky it would have sweet decorations on it, cars, cartoons, whatever, and after it was applied, and I was cleaned up, came the words, "there all better." And do you know, though the cuts still bleed and healing was still needed, it was all better for some reason.

Today as we celebrate all saints day and the many faithful Christians who have gone before us, it is fitting that we stand in the book of Hebrews chapter 11. This section has long been referred to as the Hall of Faith. We are reminded of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, and the many who are only mentioned in our lesson. Guess what they all had in common. I tell you not a one begins "let me tell you about this person who had a really easy life." In every case, faith is best demonstrated by the ou-wees and boo-boos which come in life. It is most clearly seen in some of the most trying of circumstances.

So ... Gideon, Barak (and Deborah along with him), Samson, and Jephthah all were judges in Israel all of them had to stand in some pretty dark times as Israel turned from God, usually to the world around them, and had to spill blood in war putting their own life on the line, and sometimes (Samson is the prime example) losing it as a result. David is relatively well known. Fleeing for his life on multiple occasions for following His God and for not following Him. But perhaps best known for that stand he took against the mighty Goliath on his first battlefield with just enough stones on hand for the giant and his brothers. Samuel and the prophets,

Text: Hebrews 11:32-40

³² And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. ³⁵ Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. ³⁷ They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated — ³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. ³⁹ These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. ⁴⁰ God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

were a pretty faithful bunch but not one led an easy life, many are listed among the martyrs of faith. Without pouring over the entire list, it's Isaiah whom church tradition holds was sawn in two.

Perhaps too, just a pause for those strange words in verse 35, *Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection*. The word for tortured here points to a practice of stretching out a victim on a wheel-like apparatus and then beating them until they broke and denied the faith or died. A simple denial would allow them to be set free to be resurrected, as it were, back into society. Those early Christians refused, knowing a better resurrection awaited them, purchased and won by Christ who was stretched out for them.

If you are at all like me, it's enough to make you look at these men as if they are superhuman, heroes of faith rather than God-fearing examples placed in the hall of faith. But these men were not perfect. Practically every judge in Scripture shows us an example of sin somewhere in their history, Sampson, is one of the most prideful and lustful of the bunch. David causes more of his troubles than the world around him does. The prophets often complain to God for ill-treatment in Israel or when life doesn't go as they want it to. No these were no super-human heroes, they were people like you and me. It's why the hall of faith introduces each group with the same words, "by faith" and even begins with a simple definition *Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see*.² *This is what the ancients were commended for (Hebrews 11:1-2)*.

Faith understood that though it looked like complete and utter defeat, it wasn't. Though it looked as if the people of God were down and out they weren't. That though they had endured some of the biggest ou-wees and boo-boos imaginable, even death itself there was One to run to Who could make it all better. That's really the last two verses of this lesson today.³⁹ *These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised*.⁴⁰ *God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect*.

Sometimes these words can be confusing, but not if we keep in mind the timeframe they are speaking of rather than the time frame in which they were written. None of the ancients, the Old Testament believers got to see Him. Not one was able to read the Gospel accounts, or able to think about them with Peter, Paul, or John. In this way, not one of them had received what had been promised. Though the promise was still every bit as much theirs, their place in history did not allow faith to give way to sight in the same way that our vantage point does.

Yes, God had something better planned for us. *In the fullness of time, He sent His Son* (Galatians 4:4). As Paul tells the Corinthians, *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption* (1 Corinthians 1:30). His life is credited to our account, our sin stricken from the record in His blood spilled on the cross. By faith, it all belongs to you, to them, that together with us, they would be made perfect in Christ. Paul will tell the Romans, *It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith* (Romans 4:13).

Ah, so what of us today? That question always pops into mind as I read this section. Will you stand with these saints of old? Will you endure torture and torment? Would you give up wealth, health, and even life rather than fall away? Those are all the wrong questions, dear friends. God doesn't write about these men and women of faith that we would torment ourselves with hypotheticals. He writes it to show us what faith can do. Faith focuses on Christ. Faith hears the words of Revelation in our first lesson and puts all of its hope there as it yearns for the promises God has given. Faith, when it gets an ou-wee or a boo-boo, when it suffers pain or loss, runs to the One who has compassion, who can truly help, who calms us down and grants us the strength to do whatever He may require of us. Faith runs to God.

And then we hear it, *"Blessed are you ... Great is Your reward in heaven! (Gospel: Luke 6:20-23) I am making everything new. ... To him who is thirsty, I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life! (1st Lesson: Revelation 21:1-6)"* Or as mom used to say, *"There ALL BETTER!"* And you know what, even though we haven't seen heaven just yet, even though we still live in a sin-stained and sin-scarred world, even though we may bleed physically or emotionally because of our own sin or those of another, because God has promised it, because He stands beside us, because He grants the gift of faith that believes it, well, it is! Amen.