

All Saints Day, November 2, 2008, Year A

**St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector

Scripture: Revelation 7:2-4, 9-17

***"He is worthy of our praise!"***

The primary reason that we gather here in this place – this morning - is to meet Almighty God and to Worship Him. If that doesn't happen – then we have not truly worshipped! It is my profound prayer that each of us here this morning would meet Almighty God through His Holy Word and through His Blessed Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, personally and deeply. I might add that it is important to note that each of us HAS to prepare to be in His presence, with a hunger and thirst for Him in our lives. We must diligently seek Him – and as the author of Hebrews says in 11:6 that anyone *"who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."*

How awesome it is that Holy Scripture quite often gives us a beautiful image of God with arms outstretched, inviting us to come to Him, especially in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. So tell me -what is it that makes it so hard? Well, in the words of the famous comic strip Pogo, **"We have found the enemy, and it is us."** We, ourselves, are what make it hard to meet God! There are so many distractions - so many things that clutter our hearts and our lives that can put up a roadblock in our path to God. Sins; Attitudes; Traditions; Pre-occupations; Our minds race, we might find ourselves doodling during the service, or filing our nails, jotting down a grocery list, counting the bricks in the front of the church, or heaven forbid – even taking a nap during the sermon! Each one of us needs to still our hearts to meet with God. We indeed need to, in essence, take a "time-out" from the world - when we come here to come face to face with God.

Today's New Testament reading taken from the Book of Revelation – chapter seven, is of great significance to us – and to our worship. **There is one word that is the main focus throughout – a word that must be the center of our attention. That word is God!** It is important for me to remind you that when we see and speak the word God – it is not only the Father of whom we speak, but Jesus - the Lamb upon the throne, and the Holy Spirit as well. Listen to the richness of the this text – and the name of God.

- Verse 2 *"the seal of the Living God"*
- Verse 3 – *"the bond-servants of our God"*
- Verse 10 – *"Salvation to our God"*
- Verse 11 - *"and worshipped God"*
- Verse 12 – *"be to our God forever and ever"*
- Verse 15 - *"the throne of God"*
- Verse 17 - *"and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes"*

It is crystal clear to me that the Holy Spirit desires our focus to be solely on God, and not on the events that are foretold. This chapter, this break from the terrible judgments of the previous chapter in Jesus' Revelation to John, is meant to teach us something about the character of our God; revealing important truths about our God. Oh, that He would meet with us, and may we all worship Him, today!

First we need to set the record straight: in spite of some very popular thought - **God is alive, and He's doing quite well.** The evidence is overwhelming!

- On page 718 in the Book of Common Prayer – the Psalmist tells us about God in these words from Psalm 90:2 *"Before the mountains were brought forth, or the land and the earth were born, from age to age you are God."*

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- God was alive before the beginning; He was alive in the beginning, when He spoke the earth into existence and then clothed it in nature's splendor.
- He was “the Living God” when the Emperor Domitian had the beloved Apostle John exiled on the isle of Patmos, and God was still alive when Domitian's own dead body was returned to the dust of the earth.
- God was alive when Thomas Jefferson authored the Declaration of Independence and helped give birth to what was then a Christian nation.
- He was alive and well when in the April 8, 1966 edition of Time Magazine - Thomas Altizer and other “so called” theologians proclaimed God as being dead. It made the cover of that Time magazine by simply asking the question “Is God Dead?” (*Hold up the copy of the magazine cover*)
- He is the Living God today, and He will still be the Living God long after His last critic has disappeared from the face of the earth and their memory is lost forever – dust in the wind!

**Men die but God doesn't!** He never had a beginning and He most certainly does not depend upon anyone or anything for His existence. **He always has been and always will be - the eternal, self-existing, Living God!**

In this book of Revelation – a book filled with terrible judgments, - the love of God still shines through. At the very beginning of chapter seven, there are “*four angels standing at the four corners of the earth,*” who are holding back the four winds of the earth. They are **holding back the winds of judgment** until the servants of God are sealed. We are told that there are exactly 144,000; they are Jews, 12,000 each from 12 tribes of Jacob – also known as Israel. **This is a great witness of God's love!** Although Israel rejected God and crucified His Savior, their Messiah, God has not written them off. Instead, God's heart is filled with love for them and they are included in His plan. **God has not forgotten Israel.** It is very significant that Israel plays such a large part in the news of the world and why it has refused to stay dead, buried in the pages of history? Remarkably since its resurrection in 1948, has it been the center of so much attention. Let me remind you that the Prophet Jeremiah told us of God's pledge of love to the Jewish people. God said: “*I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with loving-kindness. Again I will build you and you will be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel! Again you will take up your tambourines, and go forth to the dances of the merrymakers. Again you will plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria; the planters will plant and will enjoy them. For there will be a day when watchmen on the hills of Ephraim call out, 'Arise, and let us go up to Zion, To the LORD our God.'*” (Jeremiah 31:3-6) The sealing of the 144,000 is a testimony to the everlasting love of God for the Jew. He hasn't rejected them and God won't let us forget that He still loves them.

Then we see the salvation of the multitudes - they are numberless – “*a great multitude which no one could count.*” Too many for any human to count – but God knows the number! This multitude is made up of all nationalities, representing every nation, every ethnic group, and every language upon the earth. They are a great harvest of souls from the great tribulation. Their robes have been washed white by the blood of the Lamb! These Saints of God fall under His protection and His provision– and so they sing with the angels - of God's glory and majesty.

That, my friends, is the love of God. Imagine that, after centuries of patiently pleading with mankind to come to Him, to believe in Him, and to glorify Him, and having been rejected and

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scorned while humanity lived as they pleased, multiplying their sins, but in the last terrible days upon the earth, **the Gospel invitation still goes out to whoever calls upon the Name of the Lord!** That is the love of God. And it is the love of God that takes these individuals and places them before His Holy Throne - day and night, feeding them, satisfying them, and tenderly wiping the tears from their eyes. That is the love of God! They come to God during the very worst period of human history, saved from the very jaws of death while teetering on the very brink of hell. That is the love of God!

My friends - He is Lord! His is supreme; it is God who sits on the throne and He sits there because He is in control! Throughout all of Holy Scripture, God is never seen pacing the floor. He is never seen at a bargaining table trying to negotiate a solution for some worldly problems. Instead He is always seen seated as a figure of peace, with everything completely in control. God's Holy Heaven isn't coming apart at the seams; His Kingdom isn't unraveling before your very eyes; His economy is sound. My brothers and sisters in Christ:

- ❖ God sits upon the throne because He is in charge. His throne speaks of God's right to rule. No matter what the world may tell us about our own abilities, our knowledge and our strengths - we do not have the power to give God authority over our lives. God already has it - whether we give it to Him or not! We need to accept and submit to His authority, for each one of us will answer to that authority eventually.
- ❖ God wasn't elected to His office, and **He cannot be voted out!** He is the Supreme Court, the Legislature, and the Chief Executive – all in one! **God is in charge and it is at His pleasure that we serve Him.**

Listen to these words from Psalm 115, verses 1-3: *“Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your Name give glory; because of your love and because of your faithfulness. Why should the heathen say, “Where then is their God?” Our God is in heaven; whatever he wills to do he does.”* Listen to these words of God through the Prophet Isaiah: *“Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure”* (Isaiah 46:9-10) God is THE supreme, sovereign being; His purposes cannot be frustrated. That, my friends is what it means for God to be God, He IS Lord. Our primary aim in life ought to be to make Him God in our lives. God stands alone; He is distinguished for His superiority. In our lesson today, and in our worship - God is celebrated for:

- His superiority,
- His blessing,
- His glory,
- His wisdom,
- His honor: He is worthy of our deepest reverence and praise,
- His power and His might: **He is the Almighty - He has no equal** – no-one even comes close! Please, don't ever doubt that!

Just look at the blazing sun, and the billions of shining stars, and remember that God made them. Look at the tiniest atom, which when split unleashes awesome power, and remember that God made it as well.

In the prophet Malachi, chapter three, VERSE 6 – God proclaims: *“I, the Lord, do not change!”* Indeed, in Revelation chapter seven we continue to see a God who will not change. **He is, and always will be,**

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- **The Living God.**

**He is, and always will be,**

- **A Loving God abundant in mercy, rich in grace, ready to forgive, willing to save.**

**He is, and always will be,**

- **Lord.**

God promises to us, as those who seek to worship Him – His countenance and eternal life with Him. As the elder proclaimed: "*For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them.* (Revelation 7:15)

His Temple! His Church – His place of Worship! His tabernacle or tent will be spread over us! How absolutely humbling and awe inspiring to receive His covering of protection and eternal provision.

So let me ask you –

- Will we continue to clutter our lives with lesser things, or will we diligently seek after Him? To worship Him? To praise Him?
- Will we continue to be awed by the insignificant, or will we make room in our lives to be awed by the might and majesty of God?

Now, let us join with the multitudes and all of the angels and saints of God – and join in singing His praise – in humble worship.

### **Salvation Belongs To Our God** *Author Unknown*

Salvation belongs to our God  
Who sits upon the throne,  
And unto the Lamb.  
Praise and Glory,  
Wisdom and thanks,  
Honor and Power and Strength.

Be to our God forever and ever,  
Be to our God forever and ever,  
Be to our God forever and ever, Amen.

And we, the redeemed shall be strong  
In purpose, and unity  
Declaring aloud  
Praise and glory  
Wisdom and thanks  
Honor and power and strength

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### **To Him Who Sits On The Throne** *Public Domain*

To Him who sits on the Throne and unto the Lamb  
To Him who sits on the throne and unto the Lamb  
Be blessing and Glory and Honor and Power forever!  
Be blessing and Glory and Honor and Power forever!