

#1802  
Cf. #113 #794

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18<sup>1</sup>  
Our LORD Jesus, who died & rose again, will  
come & take us to heaven on the Last Day.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Last Sunday of Reformation &  
Endtime – The Sunday of Saints Triumphant  
Supplementary Lectionary  
Series “B,” Epistles

Pastor A. J. Kunde  
Grace WELS Durand MI  
November 17, 2013  
3 p.m. Hope WELS Swartz Creek,  
Dedication of Flint PCC new home.  
3 p.m. WLS 150 yr celeb, streamed.

<sup>13</sup> Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest, who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. <sup>15</sup> According to the LORD’s own Word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the Coming of the LORD, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the LORD himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the Archangel and with the Trumpet Call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> After that, we who are still alive and are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the LORD in the air. And so we will be with the LORD forever. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage [comfort] each other with these words.

WHO ARE THE SAINTS TRIUMPHANT?  
I. BELIEVERS WHO HAVE DIED  
II. BELIEVERS WHO ARE STILL ALIVE

In the Name of Jesus, who is coming again to take to himself in heaven all who believe in him,  
Dear Fellow-Saints – believers in Jesus,

As noted on the front of your worship folder, this Second Last Sunday of the Season of Reformation and Endtime has been named, “The Sunday of Saints Triumphant.” Who are these saints?

In one of its many false doctrines, the Roman Catholic Papacy states that a saint is someone who has died and has “sainthood” conferred on them by the Pope. In order for such sainthood to be conferred, a person needs to have done some sort of miracle. Thus, again, the Roman Catholic Papacy fulfills the warning St. Paul states in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, concerning the “man of lawlessness” – the Antichrist, the Pope – that

**<sup>9</sup> The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders <sup>10</sup> and in**

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<sup>1</sup> *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984.  
All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

***every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they have refused to love the Truth and so be saved*** (2 Thessalonians 2:9&10).

On the other hand, what do the Scriptures, the Bible, God's Word – what does God's Word say about those who are saints?

The Bible tells us that those who are saints, holy ones, are believers – both living and dead. Anyone who believes in Jesus as his or her Lord and Savior, is a saint. That means you and I who believe in Jesus are also saints. All believers in Jesus, whether they have died or are still alive, are part of the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, the Fellowship of All Believers in Jesus. This morning, we have the privilege of examining this truth in the context of the Last Day when Jesus comes again. WHO ARE THE SAINTS TRIUMPHANT? I. BELIEVERS WHO HAVE DIED; and, II. BELIEVERS WHO ARE STILL ALIVE when Jesus comes.

### WHO ARE THE SAINTS TRIUMPHANT? I. BELIEVERS WHO HAVE DIED

St. Paul writes, "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep" (4:13a). St. Paul refers to those to whom he is writing in Thessalonica, a major seaport city in Macedonia – Paul refers to these Christians as "brothers." They are not brothers by birth or relation; they are brothers by one faith in Jesus. They became brothers and sisters in Jesus by the work of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel in Word and Sacraments – Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. That is also the way you and I have become brothers and sisters in Jesus – through the Gospel. St. Paul does not want these fellow believers to be ignorant.

There was apparently an erroneous opinion circulating among the Thessalonian Christians concerning whether or not those who had died believing in Jesus would also be in heaven on the Last Day. Paul says he does not want them to ignorant about "those who have fallen asleep."

The term "fallen asleep" is away in which the Bible refers to those who have died in faith in Jesus. When Stephen, the first New Testament martyr, was being murdered by a mob of Jews, the Bible describes his death as a falling asleep (cf. Acts 7:60). When the Apostle Paul was writing about Jesus' resurrection from the dead and its implications for believers, St. Paul said, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20). Clearly, the phrase "fallen asleep" or "fallen asleep in Christ" or "fallen asleep in Jesus," is a way of referring to those who have died believing in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. St. Paul continues.

"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest, who have no hope" (4:13). When St. Paul refers to those "who have no hope," he is

referring to unbelievers – to pagans – for anyone who does not believe in Jesus is a pagan. Such a category refers to those who are Muslims, Buddhists, Shintoists, and those of the Jewish faith, all of whom reject Jesus. It also refers to so-called Christians who say they believe but then add that a person must live a certain kind of life and do or not do certain kinds things in order to be saved. “Do not grieve like them,” St. Paul has said.

Perhaps you have witnessed such grieving. Sometimes the newscasts have segments showing the excessive weeping and wailing of those who do not believe in Jesus. Perhaps you have acquaintances who do not know Jesus as their Savior – perhaps you have seen them weep and cry inconsolably at the death of a friend or relative. “Do not grieve and weep like them,” St. Paul says. Oh, believers will have tears at the death of a fellow-believer in Jesus, but those tears will include tears of joy that their fellow-believer is in heaven with Jesus. Then, St. Paul states why believers in Jesus do have hope.

St. Paul says, “We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him” (4:14). Jesus is the center, the reason, for believers to have hope. Paul says, “we believe that Jesus died.” You know about Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross and his resurrection.

Jesus was betrayed into the hands of the Jews. The High Priest Caiaphas along with the Jewish Sanhedrin – their Supreme Court – condemned Jesus as being worthy of death, because Jesus confessed that he was indeed the Son of God, the Messiah, the Christ. These Jews then turned Jesus over to the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate. Pilate soon discovered that Jesus was innocent of all the charges the Jews were bringing against him. But, in order to please the crowd and prevent a riot from taking place, Pontius Pilate turned Jesus over to be executed by crucifixion.

Jesus was nailed, hands and feet, to the cross. Jesus hung on that cross from nine o’clock in the morning till three o’clock in the afternoon. Around noon of that Good Friday, Jesus cried out, “My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46b; Mark 15:34b). God had forsaken Jesus; God had brought down upon Jesus the punishment for all of the sins of the world. Jesus’ cry from the cross, “It is finished!” (John 19:30a), signaled that he had suffered completely all of the punishment for the sins of the world for all time – Jesus is the Sacrifice of Atonement for the sins of all (1 Peter 3:18a; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is the public proclamation of this forgiveness of sins for all.

The Apostle Paul writes to the Romans, “[Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” or “because we were justified.” To be justified means to be declared righteous, to be declared innocent, to be acquitted; to be justified means to have the forgiveness of sins. Jesus’ resurrection testified to this forgiveness of sins given to and pronounced upon all.

There are so many testimonies to the fact of Jesus' resurrection on Easter Sunday morning. Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene – she was the first to see the risen Jesus. Jesus appeared to a number of women hurrying back to Jerusalem from his empty tomb. Jesus appeared to Peter. Jesus appeared to two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus, one of whom was named Cleopas. Jesus appeared to all of the believers gathered together on that first Easter evening behind closed and locked doors. A week later, Jesus again appeared to these believers with the addition of his disciple Thomas. Jesus appeared to Peter, John and others by the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus appeared to more than five hundred believers at one time. Jesus appeared to the believers who gathered together on the Mount of Olives and witnessed Jesus' ascension into heaven. Jesus appeared to the Apostle Paul. No doubt about it: Jesus is risen! Now the Apostle Paul states that those who believe in Jesus will also rise from the dead.

St. Paul states, "We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him" (4:14). This resurrection of the dead who have fallen asleep in Jesus will occur on the Last Day. St. Paul gives a description.

St. Paul says, "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the Archangel and with the Trumpet Call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first" (4:16). As the Lord Jesus proclaimed to his disciples,

**24:30 "... [All people] will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. <sup>31</sup> And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other"** (Matthew 24:30b&31).

The Last Day will be visible to all. On that day, all the dead will be raised up, and those who have believed in Jesus, died in faith in Jesus, who have fallen asleep in Jesus – they will be with Jesus in heaven forever in both body and soul. This is the sure and certain hope of those who have died and also of you and me as we think about those believers who have died believing in Jesus.

#### APPROPRIATION

You heard the Apostle Paul say at the end of our text, "Encourage [comfort] each other with these words" (4:18). This is certainly a great comfort to us as we think about our loved ones who have died believing in Jesus. This is a real comfort to the widow or widower whose spouse believed in Jesus. This is a real comfort to those who have lost parents or grandparents who believed in Jesus. This is a real comfort to parents or grandparents who have lost a child or a grandchild. Jesus was raised from the dead; those who have believed in Jesus will also be raised from the dead on the Last Day. This is our personal comfort too.

You and I will someday die. Our time of life on this earth is short. Moses wrote in Psalm 90, "The length of our days [on earth] is seventy years – or eighty, if we have the strength" (Psalm 90:10a). The words recorded by Isaiah also apply to you and to me:

**40:6 .... “All men are like grass,  
and all their glory is like the flowers of the field.  
7 The grass withers and the flowers fall,  
because the breath of the LORD blows on them.  
Surely the people are grass.  
8 The grass withers and the flowers fall ...”**  
(Isaiah 40:6b-8a; cf. 1 Peter 1:24).

Compared to the centuries of the existence of this earth and universe created by God, and compared to the endlessness eternity, our time on earth is very, very short.

So how should we be managing this short time of life that we have on this earth? St. Paul tells us,

**6:1 As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. 2 For he says,  
“In the time of my favor I heard you,  
and in the day of salvation I helped you”** (cf. Isaiah 49:8).  
**I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation**  
(2 Corinthians 6:1&2).

St. Paul makes it clear for us. This lifetime on earth is our time of grace. It is our time to hear the Word of God proclaimed in truth and purity; it is our time to be brought to faith in Jesus by the work of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel in Word and Sacraments – Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. It is our time to repent and believe in Jesus.

Through repentance and faith in Jesus, you and I are ready for the Last Day and Jesus’ return.

## WHO ARE THE SAINTS TRIUMPHANT? II. BELIEVERS WHO ARE STILL ALIVE

Our text states, “We believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him” (4:14b). What about the rest? What about those believers who are still alive when Jesus comes again?

St. Paul states, “According to the LORD’s own Word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the Coming of the LORD, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep” (4:15). St. Paul is indicating that there will be believers still alive when the Last Day comes. Those believers who are still alive are referred to as those “who are left till the Coming of the LORD.” The Gospel of Jesus through which the Holy Spirit brings people to faith in Jesus – that Gospel will be proclaimed till the end of time. But now, St. Paul adds that those who are still alive when Jesus comes will not precede – will not get into heaven – ahead of those who have fallen asleep in Jesus – those who have died

believing in Jesus. Together with those who have fallen asleep in Jesus, those believers still alive when Jesus comes again, will be caught up into the air with all believers.

St. Paul says, “The dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the LORD in the air. And so we will be with the LORD forever” (4:16b&17). As the Hymn verse proclaims, “Forever with the Lord. Amen. So let it be.”<sup>2</sup> What will eternity in heaven be like for those who have been brought to faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior?

The Apostle John shares the vision given to him in Revelation 21:3b&4,

**<sup>3</sup> ... “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”**

John also states,

**<sup>15</sup> ... he [Jesus] who sits on the Throne  
will spread his tent over them.  
<sup>16</sup> Never again will they hunger;  
never again will they thirst.  
The sun will not beat upon them,  
nor any scorching heat.  
<sup>17</sup> For the Lamb at the center of the throne  
will be their Shepherd;  
he will lead them to springs of living water.  
And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes”**  
(Revelation 7:15b-17).

This is the blessing and glory that awaits all those who have been brought to faith in Jesus. So what should believers be doing now during their time of grace on this earth?

Obviously, believers in Jesus will desire to continue in faith in Jesus during their lifetime on earth. The Holy Spirit who brought them to faith will continue and strengthen that faith through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. In addition, believers will want to encourage and comfort one another in that faith in Jesus.

St. Paul writes, “Therefore encourage [comfort; *parakalei`te*] each other with these words” (4:18). It is comfort, consolation and encouragement from God’s Word that believers need while they are on this earth and in this life.

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<sup>2</sup> *Christian Worship – A Lutheran Hymnal* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), 213:1.

## APPROPRIATION

Times on this earth are often dreary and sad. Times on this earth will be filled with disappointments that bring us to the edge of despair. Times on this earth will have their tribulations, trials, turmoils, troubles and temptations. There will be sickness, disease, illness, pain and disability. There will be sadness especially when believing loved ones die. But here is the comfort, consolation and encouragement: We who believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior “will be with the LORD forever” (4:17b).

This, dear fellow believers in Jesus – this is what is waiting for you and for me as well as for all those who have died in faith in Jesus. This is our time of grace. This is our time to hear the Gospel and be brought to faith in Jesus. Let us not be weighed down with earthly concerns – “‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’” (Matthew 6:31). Let us not be derailed by the pleasures, pursuits and vanities of this world. Let us rather focus on Jesus Christ, crucified, dead, buried and risen! Jesus arisen from the dead is our sure and certain hope and guarantee of eternity in heaven.

## CONCLUSION

As we celebrate this Sunday of the Saints Triumphant, it gives us an opportunity to hear once again that by faith in Jesus we are among those Saints Triumphant. Now, for a little while, we struggle with tears and sorrows, tribulations and troubles. But those times will soon be over - past. By God’s grace alone through faith alone in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we will be in heaven. “Forever with the Lord! Amen! So let it be!”