

2nd Last Sunday
1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18
November 15, 2009

The evening before Jesus offered Himself as a holy sacrifice of atonement, three days before He would raise Himself from the dead, Jesus said, "Because I live, you also will live."

A few days before that, just outside the big city of Jerusalem, Jesus raised a man named Lazarus from the dead. He had been in a tomb four days. Jesus told his sister, Martha, "I am the Resurrection and the Life, whoever believes in Me will live even though he dies and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die."

What St. Paul says here assures us of exactly the same thing!

Today, we are going to focus on the matter of living with Jesus forever. We call today "Saints Triumphant Sunday."

The Lord's Day Is When the Whole Church of All the
Ages Will be United in Glory.

People have believed in the Savior in every age. People who lived in the pre-flood age trusted in the LORD who was to be born of the woman, who would defeat satan, people like Eve and Abel; people like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the ages of the Patriarchs; people like Moses and Aaron in the pre-Canaan age; people like Gideon, Naomi and Ruth in the age of the Judges; people like David and Hezekiah and Joseph in the age of the kings; people like Daniel in the Babylonian Captivity years and people like Zechariah and Malachi after that time.

The ages continue to go by. But after all those B.C. times I just mentioned, the Savior came. By His obedient, sinless, substitutionary life and by His innocent suffering and death in our place, Jesus won forgiveness and righteousness for sinners and offers these gifts by the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Because Jesus rose from the dead, He still offers the gifts to us today.

Now the Church waits again for Jesus to come again. It's the coming the Apostle talks about in these verses.

As the hymn we just sang says, "The Church has waited long." The ages have continued to come and go, the Roman age, the Middle Ages, the Age of Enlightenment, the Age of Reason, the Industrial Age. Here's an ominous sounding one, the one we live in, the one some have labeled the Post-Christian Era.

Yet, all these A.D. ages are, as far as God is concerned, just one age, the Lasts Days. We also know it as the New Testament Times.

The Church has been waiting while in this world. It's been a long wait; another 150 years have passed since that hymn was written. It's a lonely wait. No one but God's people in Christ wait. The world doesn't even like follower of Jesus. Scripture describes the faithful as strangers and foreigners in this world, in the world but not of it. And what devout believer in the Savior does not share with Him in sorrows, pain, and even death. Satan hates believers in Jesus and even stirs up people sometimes to abuse and kill them.

But the Apostle Paul gives us a whole different perspective for this time in which we live, the Last Days.

We are reminded that, for as long as these days seen, they are temporary. The Lasts Days will end with the Last Day. Paul. Again, encourages us by telling us that the Last Day is the Day Jesus our Savior comes again. In the next chapter, he calls it the Day of the Lord, probable the most common name for it in the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul makes it clear that the Lord is Jesus.

Yes, we all need encouragement while we wait, encouragement as the world rejects Christ, encouragement as satan and his forces attack , encouragement as unbelief and sin get bolder and more open, when sins are painted pretty, encouragement as we see ourselves and others age and die. We do experience loneliness and sorrow. For all this, these versus of God's Word offer us encouragement, offer us hope, ease the grief.

The Church is divided. No, I'm not talking about the earthly churches divided because people have found lost of ways through the centuries to differ with God's Word. Some don't go along with God's Word on this point and others with that teaching, etc, etc, and so division after division happens. No, I speak of the Church, the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints. You ask how is that Church divided? Some have died and their presence with us has been taken away. But we are still here. There's that separation.

But the Day of the Lord is coming. The every believer in Jesus from the beginning of time to the end will be united. They will be together with Jesus in the same place at the same time, for all eternity.

When Jesus appears the second time, as Hebrews 9 put it last Sunday, Jesus will come from heaven with awesome power and glory, with a loud command, with voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God.

What will be His command? It'll be "Wake Up!" And everyone who has previously died will wake up. These versus don't mention unbelievers. Last Sunday, we heard Jesus say, "All who are in their graves will hear the voice of the Son of Man and come out." He told how some will rise to be condemned and the other rise to live. Daniel told us the same this morning. Here Paul talks only about those who rise to live.

The dead in Christ – believers – will rise first. First as compared to whom? As compared to all the Christians at that time still living on this Earth. No sooner will the

dead in Christ have their bodies resurrected and reunited with their souls than the still earthly Christians will be ascended to Jesus. Not only will the bodies of believers be raised, but they will be changed from mortal to immortal, from perishable to imperishable. The same thing will happen to the bodies of the believers still alive on Earth. This change to glory, to sinless perfection, to eternal life will happen in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye – and that's fast! This Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15.

Then all Christians, the ones who have previously died and the ones who had been still alive on the Earth, will be glorified, will be together, and will be with Jesus, face to face, forever – With Jesus Forever – that is worship and fellowship and joy and glory and life; that is the fulfillment of being God's holy, perfect creation, spiritual, intelligent, just, moral, rulers and caretakers of the rest of God's new creation, for the old order of things will have passed away and all things will be new. Encourage one another with these words. Amen.