

Revelation 7:13-17

“These in white robes – who are they, and where did they come from?” I answered, “Sir, you know.” And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Therefore, “they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. 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.”

*In Christ Jesus, Our Resurrected Savior,
Dearly beloved Mourners and Friends:*

“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” **I Corinthians 15:55-56** That is the anthem of victory and triumph which we Christians sing at the graves of our friends who are asleep in Christ. By this joyful acclaim we show

that a Christian's death is not a conquest and victory for death and the grave, but, a VICTORY over death and the grave.

A Christian's death, therefore, is not only a cause of weeping and mourning - but it is also an occasion of triumph and thanksgiving. It is true that Christians are not insensible to the pain of parting, nor does God expect us to feel no sorrow when a one loved is taken away by death. Christ himself wept at the grave of Lazarus and we Christians also weep at the departure of our loved ones. At the same time we do not weep as those who have no hope. Our sorrow is mingled with thanksgiving and praise because we know that when one dies in Christ - death and the grave have been conquered.

It is this way for every Christian, but especially in this case. While we weep and are moved at the departure of our beloved sister - at the same time (*in the midst of our weeping and sorrow*) we are also thanking and praising God for his mercy. It is God who has given her deliverance from pain and victory over death and the grave.

Those who knew her learned more and more to love and esteem her highly for those graces which God, in his mercy, bestowed upon her. We are deeply affected by her departure because as her sorrow and distress neared the end, her faith was revealed more and more. The people here in our congregation know that we have lost a faithful mother in Israel for she continually thought of the welfare of her congregation, spoke of

it, prayed for it, and would have done much more if she were granted more ability and opportunity.

And yet we all join in praising God. Why? Because we certainly believe that though she is sleeping here (*asleep in Jesus*) - she belongs to those of whom our text speaks. She is one of the multitudes who are before the throne of God to serve him day and night. Therefore let me upon this occasion speak to you upon that subject of which this text treats:

The Battle and Victory of a Christian

I

Our text and the words immediately preceding our text, tell us that St. John the Divine had a vision of heaven and eternity. He saw God upon his throne and an innumerable multitude of all kindreds and people, tongues and nations; they were clothed in white raiment, and had palms in their hands, and sang beautiful, lovely hymns of praise to God, their Creator. And when he asked: **“These in white robes – who are they, and where did they come from?” Revelation 7:13** The angel told him: **“These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Revelation 7:14** He thereby told John the Divine that those whom he saw with such clean robes made so white, singing hymns, had not always been so blessed, had not always been so clean and perfect. These people in the white robes had not always presented such a picture of joy and victory, but that at one

time they had been in great tribulation and at one time their robes had been unclean. These people had been the soldiers who fought the hottest battle.

God, through St. John's vision, thereby referred to the fact that when Christ calls us out of the darkness of this world into the light of his Gospel and makes us his followers – that he does not at once translate us into heavenly bliss. God does not at once ask us to partake of his glory, but rather invites us, first of all, to suffer with him and go through the trials and tribulations that are allotted to us. God wishes that we Christians first taste something of sin's curse before we experience heaven's bliss. Therefore, he has laid down the rule that: **“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.” Acts 14:22**

If we are not chastised by God, then we are not children of God. If any one here has no cross or sorrow – that person would be far from thinking that everything is right. Such a person has, rather, great reason to ask whether he or she is a Christian after all. Christ tells us that if we are Christians, we must bear our cross and follow him. Only by the way of battle, by the way of tribulation, and by the way of sorrow can we come to the crown and glory that God has prepared for us.

Therefore, Christ expressly says: **“But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you that laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.”** And again it is written: **“Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.” Luke 6:21**

One often hears that when a person has suffered greatly and finally dies: *"It is a blessing that death came; now all ills have been overcome and are ended."* But this saying can be an empty illusion for some because these blessings and words of comfort cannot be spoken to all of them. No, my friends, those who die without the Savior will die in their sins and death will take them from temporal suffering and misery into the pain and misery of eternal damnation. **"... those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."** Isaiah 66:24

Therefore our text asks the question: **"These in white robes – who are they, and where did they come from?"** Revelations 7:13 The answer is given: **"These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."** Revelation 7:14 So then, these are the people who were sinners but in faith had trusted in the blood of Christ. These white-robed souls overcame, conquered, and had been faithful unto death. Because of their faith, the Lord had rescued them and brought them to heaven and eternal rest. And why had they been rescued and saved? If you would have asked our departed sister: *"Wherein lay your strength and how did you bear it and conquer?"* She would have said: *"See, I am a person of such great power and great spiritual strength?"* No, my friends, as she often told me: *"I have no strength in myself at all. If God did not help me, keep me, uphold me and strengthen me, I would soon be lost."* She did not only belong to those who came

out of great tribulation but she also belonged to those (*and this is more important*) who washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Her trust was not in herself, she did not have a false trust in her own flesh and blood. She could declare: *"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."* So God (*Christ, the Good Shepherd*) held her and had been her shepherd through the many years of her early life. God also cared for her and kept her in later life, fulfilling the promise which I recently quoted to her: **"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."** **John 10:27-28** She did not believe that her own afflictions and sufferings made up for her past transgressions and sins, or that her own sufferings saved her. She did not say: *"I have now suffered so much on this earth that God will give me no further suffering."* No, her hope was in Jesus Christ alone. She knew that by the suffering of Jesus on the cross she had the forgiveness of sins. She made her robe white from all transgressions and sin in the blood of the Lamb.

It is important to mention that she had been bed-ridden these many years. But no matter how much you pitied and felt sorry for her, she was far better off in all the vicissitudes of this life than an unbeliever is in all his riches, power, and good health. For if you do not wash your robes and make them white in the blood of

the Lamb, there is in store for you that which is a thousand times worse than anything that happened to her on this earth. Your eternity will be far, far worse than the short time of suffering given to you on this earth.

In the midst of her quiet hours, the departed did not think selfishly of herself. She did what she could to help others in good advice and she prayed earnestly for them. I know that she prayed for her family; she prayed for her congregation, and she prayed for her pastor. In her leisure, she thought of the welfare of others and took their cause before the Lord in prayer. By her example, we can also learn to contribute of our means to our congregation and to also pray for it. We do not know how much has been accomplished in the church through the prayer of earnest Christians. These invalid Christians accomplish more than their friends, relatives, family, church and pastor - much more than we will discover this side of eternity. She was so grateful to all who showed her any consideration, grateful to all who did anything for her. What a pleasure it would be to follow her example and be able to help those in distress. We know that Christ himself has said: **“I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” Matthew 25:40**

See then my friends, her strength was in God's Word, in the Sacraments, and in prayer. How she longed to receive the Lord's Supper for the strengthening of her faith and for the assurance of forgiveness. We must look back upon everything now and admire God's grace and comfort that upheld her so many years

until her final victory. It was God that made her patient to endure her physical suffering.

And my friends, you also have a battle to fight. Why do you not seek that same strength and help offered in God's blessed Word? Why do you not go to the throne of Christ and bring there all your concern, sorrow and trouble? What a victory the Lord will also give you!

II

Now the battle is over for Lena. What our beloved sister so earnestly prayed and longed for (*not for a day, weeks or months, but for years*) - that is now hers forever. She did not look for restored health here on earth, but she lifted up her eyes to heaven and eternity. She was always cheered when we spoke to her of heaven and read what the Bible says about the fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore. Her expectation was to be at the right hand of God and at last be delivered from all pain and trouble - and to finally rest in the glory of eternity.

At her resurrection, the departed will experience the truth of St. Paul's words: **"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." Romans 8:18** She is in the company described in the closing verses for our text: **"... they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon**

them, nor any scorching heat. 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.”
Rev. 7:15-17

That is her victory, for she is now in the company of the blessed. She is no longer touched by sin or its ravages. By trusting and clinging to his Word found in the Bible, may God also grant us patience in all of our troubles. Let us call on God to give us strength when we are weak so that we might fulfill his purpose for our life on this earth. The God that held and delivered the departed can also hold and deliver us. If some Christians can endure such trials - are we to murmur against God when he also gives us a few light burdens?

**Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas?**

Grant that we, each in his or her place, follow those who have here led the way through great tribulation. Now they have made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. One day we will meet them before the throne of God and he will wipe all tears from our eyes.

**Sure, I must fight if I would reign, increase my courage Lord!
I'll bear the toil and endure the pain, support me by thy Word.**