

**“The Glorious Heavenly City – Home of the Blessed Saints”**  
(Revelation 22:1-5, 12-17 – Saints Triumphant – November 17, 2024)

Revelation 22:1-5, 12-17:

<sup>1</sup>Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup>through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup>No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. <sup>4</sup>They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup>And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever....

<sup>12</sup>“Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done. <sup>13</sup>I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” <sup>14</sup>Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. <sup>15</sup>Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. <sup>16</sup>“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.” <sup>17</sup>The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

Dear blessed saints of God in Christ Jesus:

On this Saints Triumphant Sunday, we rejoice that by the grace of God, we are counted among His saints – His holy ones. By the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ, we are washed and sanctified; through the Holy Spirit given faith, we are united with God’s Son as heirs of eternal life. As such, we are united with all believers in Christ who have gone before and all who will come after – all who will be brought home at last to heaven. As we sing in the hymn:

O blest communion, fellowship divine,  
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;  
Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine!  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
(“For All the Saints”)

Today, our text reveals to us that home of glory in which the saints in Christ who have gone ahead now shine, that blessed home to which we long to come at last: **“The Glorious Heavenly City – Home of the Blessed Saints.”** It leads us to ask: **1) What is it like?** and **2) Who will live there?**

### 1) What is it like?

First, what is that glorious heavenly city like? Here, as the apostle John is being given a vision of heaven through an angel, we read: *“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations”* (vs. 1-2).

The river of the water of life and the tree of life both remind us of the first Paradise God created. God placed the tree of life in the midst of the Garden of Eden, and a river flowed through it. Adam and Eve were free to drink of that pure water, and eat of the tree of life, along with all the other trees. They enjoyed perfect health and life that would last forever in the blessed presence of God.

God also placed in the Garden the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which they were forbidden to eat. For if they did, they would surely die. By obeying God’s command, they would show worship and love for Him as Creator and eternal life Giver. But they were tempted by Satan in the form of a serpent, and they ate. Therefore, with sin they were cursed with death and all the troubles of a fallen world. God drove them out of Eden and placed cherubim and a flaming sword to guard them from eating from the tree of life and living forever (Genesis 2-3). Not only did the curse of sin and death affect them; as the fallen children of Adam, we all feel the curse of sin in a life with trouble, sickness, pain, and death (Romans 5:12).

But in this vision, we see Paradise once lost regained in heaven. *“No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him”* (vs. 3). The blessed saints live in the glorious presence of God the Father; and the Lamb, Jesus His Son. It is because of what He has done that Paradise is restored. Here we are reminded of another tree, the tree of the cross. As God promised after the fall, the Seed of the woman would come to conquer Satan and reverse the curse on fallen mankind (Genesis 3:15). Jesus is that Seed, the Son of God born in human flesh. As the Lamb of God, He came to take away the sin of the world by His blood sacrifice (John 1:29). Jesus Himself was cursed for us as He hung on the tree of the cross (Galatians 3:13). He bore the punishment of death for our sins.

Now through the cross of Christ, the crucified and risen Lamb of God, eternal life is restored to us fallen sinners. This is the eternal life enjoyed by the saints in His glorious presence. As pictured, from the throne of God and the Lamb, *“the river of the water of life”* flows along the street of the heavenly city. It is lined on either side by *“the tree of life,”* bearing fruit regularly, with leaves for healing.

From the throne of God and the Lamb, the saints eat and drink and live forever. They are healed of every ill, free of *“anything accursed.”* Often Scripture describes heaven by the absence of all that is wrong in this fallen world. As in Revelation 7:14: *“They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”* And Revelation 21:4: *“there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”*

In place of all that, there is perfect bliss in the presence of God and the Lamb. It says of all the saints, gathered before His throne: *“his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever”* (vs. 3-4). Formerly, fallen sinners could not see the face of God and live. But there, the saints who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, all who have His name on their foreheads and belong to Him, see Him face to face. They bask in the light of His glory as those who are glorified with Him. With eternal pleasures at His right hand to look forward to, they join the angels worshiping and serving Him with joy.

## 2) Who will live there?

As we behold that home of the blessed saints, we are led to ask: *“Who will live there?”* Who is numbered among the saints who will live and reign in the presence of God and the Lamb forever?

Here Jesus speaks as the one who knows: *“Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end”* (vs. 12). Later He says: *“I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star”* (vs. 16). As the Son of God and Son of David, He once came into the world to win salvation for all. He will come again as Judge of all. When it says He will repay everyone for what he has done, Scripture teaches that we are saved by God’s grace alone, through faith in Christ alone, not by our works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Yet one’s works and way of life are evidence of whether he belongs to Jesus by faith, or not

We hear that difference as it says: *“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood”* (vs. 14-15).

First, consider those who will not enter the heavenly city. They continue to love and practice falsehood. They are led by Satan’s lies in idolatry and false religion. They are led by the lusts of the flesh. They may hear God’s Word that condemns sin, but instead of

repenting they justify their behavior. They want to justify themselves as good people who deserve to enter heaven. They may call themselves Christians, with the support of false teachers who preach what they want to hear. But they follow the same old lie of Satan, that they may live as their own god and do as they please. By impenitence and unbelief, they keep eating the same forbidden fruit and dying in their sin. Therefore, they will not enter eternal life in heaven, but eternal death in hell. They will *“be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”* (Matthew 8:12).

But *“Blessed are those who wash their robes...”* These words remind us that the only way anyone enters the heavenly city is by being washed of sin by the blood of the Lamb. This is how all the saints are pictured in Revelation 7:13-14. As the great multitude is gathered before the throne of God and the Lamb, the question is asked: *“Who are these arrayed in white robes?”* The answer is given: They are all who have *“washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”*

As believers, this side of heaven we struggle with our sinful nature. We fall into temptation and sin. But as God’s Law reveals wrong desires, thoughts, words, and deeds, we repent. We do not justify ourselves and make excuses to continue in them. We confess our sins before the throne of God, pleading only the blood of His Son to wash them all away. And God Himself justifies us, cleansing us of sin and clothing us in Jesus’ holiness.

God Himself has made us His saints. By His Gospel, His Spirit puts faith in our hearts to receive all that Jesus won for us. In Holy Baptism, the water flowing from God’s throne of grace, mingled with the blood of Jesus, washes away our sins. In Holy Absolution, as we confess our sins Jesus declares us pardoned by His blood sacrifice. At His Holy Table, we come as penitent sinners, and Jesus gives His Body and Blood for our forgiveness. By faith, we partake of His life-giving Word and Sacrament. And when He calls us home to heaven, He will give us to eat of the tree of life and lead us to springs of living water.

This is the Gospel held out by the Holy Spirit and Christ’s Bride, the Church. *“The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come’; And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price”* (vs. 17). The invitation is to all who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and the gift is freely received through faith. Jesus says in John 4:14: *“whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”*

So we say: *“Come, Lord Jesus!”* (vs. 20). Bring us to the glorious heavenly city – home of the blessed saints. Today we join that “blest communion, fellowship divine” – we join all the saints and angels around the throne of God in joyful worship, singing: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.