



life. Your reward will be great in heaven. Only faith can believe this promise. Only faith can confess the comfort it contains. You are the Church Militant, brothers and sisters. No one ever fighting a war in the history of humankind ever returned from the front lines of fierce battle saying, “Well, that was nice. What a cozy battle field that was!” You are fighting a spiritual battle every single day. And if you think you are not, than Satan is slaying you unawares!

Behold, Jesus “is your rock, your fortress and your might; Thou, Lord, your captain in the well-fought fight” (LSB Hymn #677, v. 2). You are the Church militant, but the war has been won in Christ. Sometimes it might feel like you are losing. Maybe you are fighting an addiction that over and over again triumphs over you. Or you feel like you are stuck in a rut that you just can’t seem to get out of, or a spiritual funk where you can’t seem to find any joy in Christ’s Word or Sacraments. As we sang in the Processional Hymn, v. 5 “And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long, steals on the ear the distant triumph song, And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong. Alleluia! Alleluia!” That distant triumph song is the cry that Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia! Yes, you are fighting what sometimes might feel like an endless, uphill battle, but the “golden evening brightens in the west; soon, soon to faithful warriors cometh rest. Sweet is the calm of paradise the blest. Alleluia!” Keep fighting, brothers and sisters. As we sing in another hymn, “Be still, my soul, the Lord is on your side!”

In the Gospel reading, Beatitudes 2-7 have a different formula than the other three. Instead of the “Blessed are the... for *theirs is*”, we have: “Blessed are the... for they *shall*.” For the Church Militant, while the kingdom of heaven is yours now through the Means of Grace, received through faith, this is the promise that in Christ there is coming a yet more glorious day, when all the saints will be eternally “comforted... satisfied... receive mercy... see God... called sons of God... and inherit the earth.” *This* is what the saints before us have in Christ now! This yet more glorious day will be when the Church Militant will rest from all its labors and join the Church Triumphant for all eternity with Christ. V. 4 of the Processional hymn teaches this unity of the Church: “O blest Communion, fellowship divine, we feebly struggle, they in glory shine. Yet all are one in Thee for all are Thine, Alleluia!” The Church is never one without the other until Christ comes again. The Church is never only the Church Militant, which means the Church never shrinks. The Church is always growing. Even though Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church lost 5 of its sheep this past year as we commemorated at the beginning of the Service, the “capital-C” Church didn’t lose a single one of them. God merely transferred Mike, Pat, Bob, Kay, and Kim to the Church Triumphant.

And on the Last Day we will see them again raised in their bodies which now rest in the grave. And wherever it is that your body is laid to rest will also be raised, glorified and imperishable. I sure hope 2020 has taught us what it means to pray, “Come quickly, Lord Jesus.” Perhaps He will come again before we die, but whether He comes before we go to the grave or after, His return is certain. “Lo, He comes with clouds descending, once for every sinner slain.” As we celebrate this Festival of All Saints, we celebrate Jesus who by His death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of God the Father Almighty made this whole Festival a truthful reality for the entire Christian Church, past, present, and future. Your reward is great in heaven, brothers and sisters. And here at Church heaven comes to you. Come and receive the foretaste of that reward, where Jesus comes to you in His body and blood under the bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins. For here at the Altar we celebrate the united Church, Church Militant and Triumphant, with the angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven, giving God our laud and praise singing, “Holy, Holy, Holy!” Rejoice and be glad, your sins are forgiven! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.