The Feast of All Saints
St. Matthew 5:1-12

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

In the year that King Uzziah of Judah died, St. Isaiah had a vision of the Most Holy Place in the courts of heaven. The Lord was sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. There were angels standing above the throne—six-winged seraphs—covering themselves with two pairs of wings out of respect and modesty, being in the presence of YHWH Sabaoth. They cried to each other antiphonally words from which the *Sanctus* is derived, and the place shook for the sound of their cries while the smoke of incense filled the temple.

St. Isaiah was privileged to get a glimpse of heavenly worship. It's probably fair to say that he didn't see everything that happened in the Most Holy Place; likewise, what he revealed might only be but a portion of what he was given to see. The sights, sounds, smells, and feelings of everything going on must have been more than he could understand; I would wager even the taste of things happening was palpable and more wonderful than anything he had ever experienced below. Once the wonder of the scene catches up to him, though, he realizes who he is and where he is.

"Woe is me," he exclaims, "for I am undone!" Who is he? He is a man of unclean lips living in the midst of a people of unclean lips. And let me make things perfectly clear here. It wasn't just his lips and his people lips that were unclean. From head to toe, inside and out, St. Isaiah was impure, as were the people among whom he lived. Where is he? He is in the presence of the King, YHWH Sabaoth, and more than that, his unclean eyes have seen Him. (cf. Isaiah 6:1-5)

It makes sense that St. Isaiah would say what he said. "Woe is me, for I am undone!" When St. Moses spoke with YHWH and asked to see His glory, God responded,

> I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name [YHWH]. And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But, you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live. (Exodus 33:19-20)

It is clear from this and in other places that no man may look upon God and live. Sts. Adam and Eve hid in the Garden of Eden once their "eyes were opened." (cf. Genesis 3:10) St. Paul told St. Timothy that the King of kings and Lord of lords lives in unapproachable light which no man has seen or can see. (cf 1 Timothy 6:16) So, St. Isaiah found himself in what he believed was the presence of YHWH, in the palace of unapproachable light; he was sure that he was dead.

However, one of the seraphs flew over to him. He had in his hand a live coal, taken with the tongs from the altar where the incense was burning. The seraph touched St. Isaiah's mouth with the live coal. Those unclean lips were touched with a holy fire—a cleansing fire which purges iniquity, taking it away. And when something is purged of iniquity, it is made pure. "Behold, this has touched your lips;" the seraph said, "Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged." And let me make things perfectly clear here. As much as St. Isaiah spoke of his lips as referring to the whole of him, so here the seraph does the same thing. His lips may have been the part of St. Isaiah that was touched with a live coal, but, as the seraph said, his sin is purged. St. Isaiah could now look upon God and live! (cf. Isaiah 6:6-7)

On this day of observing All Saints, you have heard as you do on every All Saints' Day, the Beatitudes from Jesus' sermon on the mount. Jesus speaks of the blessings of being one of His saints: having possession of the kingdom of heaven, comfort, the earth as an inheritance, being filled, obtaining mercy, being called a son of God, and even having a great reward in heaven for being persecuted like the prophets who went before.

These are all great things, and blessings to rejoice in to be sure (even that persecution), but they all hinge on the one I omitted from the list. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

The blessings of the saints, and your blessings as a saint, rely on this one: being pure in heart and seeing God. One cannot look upon God and live except he be made pure in heart, unless his iniquity is taken away and his sin is purged. You need to be refined in the fire of the holiness of God so that your iniquity is taken away and your sin purged.

So, the Father sent the Son into the flesh to win and effect that change for you. You see, you still fall under the same curse that St. Isaiah faced in his vision. If you found yourself in the presence of YHWH Sabaoth, your fate would be the same as that expressed by the prophet—you would be undone—unless someone came over to you and purified you. This is the threat and curse of the Law. Your lips—your entire being—is unclean and you live in the midst of an unclean people, and for it you should die.

Therefore, "[W]hen the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." (Galatians 4:4-5) "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." He who is holy became one with you in order to assume your iniquity and sin into His own flesh and become the object of the Father's wrath. No one may look upon God and live, so God becomes man in order to die with the sins of the world. He faced that death head on and triumphed over it as death gave way to life and He rose from the grave. And for it, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, you are at peace with God, reconciled to Him, and have received the adoption as sons.

So, then, how do you become pure in heart? Well, like St. Isaiah before you, it must be done to you. You don't just wake up one morning, or one moment come to your senses, and decide to be pure; you are made pure! A seraph flew to St. Isaiah and with a live coal and with that purified him. You are made pure with water and the Word. There at the font, you were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. You were washed as the name of God was applied to you, and you were sealed with the cross on your forehead and breast to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. It is as if the seraph had come to you with those sweet words, "Your iniquity is taken away and your sin is purged."

Then, week after week, you hear it again: words that recall for you your drowning to sin and rising to newness of life. The called minister of God stands up here and proclaims to you that you are forgiven for all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Then, he ushers into your mouths the very body and blood of Jesus Christ, given and shed for you on the cross for the forgiveness of all of your sins. And you in faith receive the very things they give: forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Speaking through St. Ezekiel, YHWH prepared His remnant to come out of the Babylonian captivity. For far too long, the people of Judah had been chasing after false gods and forgetting the statutes of God. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon besieged Jerusalem several times and took people into captivity, including Sts. Ezekiel, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. But it was by the pen of St. Ezekiel that these words of YHWH are recorded:

> I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from fall your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

The captives returned, the temple was rebuilt, and for a time, the people of Judah lived in relative peace under the grace and protection of YHWH. They were washed clean, you could say, and made to dwell again in their own land.

But that sprinkling of water and being cleansed from all filthiness is of great significance for you. For it was at the font that this very thing happened to you. There, your heart of stone was

removed from you and you were given a heart of flesh. There, the Spirit of God was placed within you and you were made a new creation. That heart of pure flesh now wishes to walk in the Spirit of God, in His statutes and judgments, seeking to keep and do them. Of course, you know how the battle between your sinful flesh and new heart often bears out; that's why you come here week-in-and-week-out, to hear the Law judge you for your sins and the Gospel to bring you back to that newness of life, braced again for bearing the fruits in keeping with repentance. Nevertheless, this blessing wouldn't be yours unless you were made a saint and given a pure heart.

This is why you sing the words of St. David, week-in-and-week out, crying out to him as did the Apple of His Eye, to renew that heart of flesh that He has put in you as said through St. Ezekiel. In a few moments, you'll be singing those words,

> Create in me a clean heart, O God,
> and renew a right spirit within me.
> Cast me not away from your presence,
> and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
> Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
> and uphold me with a willing spirit. (Psalm 51:10-12)

You still wrestle Old Adam and still require a renewal of that joy of salvation—of having your heart cleaned and purified.

Living in this mysterious duality, as sinner and justified, you can look upon God and live. Of course, for the time being, all you see is an image of the crucified God, and He is the very image of the invisible God. So, look upon the crucifix, and there see your crucified God who died for you, knowing this, that on the last day, when He returns you will see God.

For it is like St. Job once said,

> Oh, that my words were written!
> Oh, that they were inscribed in a book!
> That they were engraved on a rock
> With an iron pen and lead, forever!
> For I know that my Redeemer lives,
> And He shall stand at last on the earth;
> And after my skin is destroyed, this I know,
> That in my flesh I shall see God,
> Whom I shall see for myself,
> And my eyes shall behold, and not another.
> How my heart yearns within me! (Job 19:23-27)

It's the same thing that you heard from St. John's first letter this morning:

> Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for *we shall see Him as He is*. (1 John 3:1-2, emphasis mine)

St. Job and St. John are ones who are blessed to be pure in heart, as are all the saints of God, living and dead.

In fact, St. John, like St. Isaiah, was privileged to get a glimpse of the goings on in the heavenly places, this time in the new heavens and new earth. St. John related that in his vision while exiled on Patmos, one of the seven angels showed him…

> …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. 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. 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. (Revelation 22:1-5)

God's servants shall serve Him. **They shall see His face**, and there is no fear of death because **His name shall be on their foreheads**. That name is placed on you in Holy Baptism.

So, when Blessed St. John saw this vision, he was seeing you, dear saints gathered here, with all the saints the world over and all the company of heaven. You will be gathered around the throne of God and of the Lamb, with the light of Christ shining on you. You, like St. Isaiah, St. Moses, Sts. Adam and Eve, St. Paul, St. Timothy, St. Ezekiel, St. Daniel, St. Hananiah, St. Mishael, St. Azariah, St. David, St. Job, and St. John are pure in heart, made so by way of baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. You are forgiven for all of your sins, therefore, you shall see God with your own eyes and not another, and live for eternity.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.