



Last Sunday, August 29 we celebrated the Festival of The Martyrdom of St. John the Baptist. The color of paraments for the day is red, in remembrance of the blood of the saints

shed, that have given their lives, for the Name of Jesus. But we might ask why do we “celebrate” the death of martyrs, why call it a “Festival” within the church year? It almost sounds morbid to our modern ears to commemorate the death of anyone or to even label it a celebration or festival. Obviously, we do not celebrate a person’s death, we are not glad a person has died and as Christians we do not enjoy the death of anyone. There is more to understand in the church’s usage of the celebrations, Festivals and commemorations in the liturgical calendar.

Throughout the church year, we remember the work of our Savior Jesus Christ from the season of Advent through the Easter Season. The first half of the church year teaches the life, ministry suffering and death of Christ including His Ascension which teaches His governance over all things for the good of His church to the proclamation of the Gospel. Through the church year, we look on the lives of the saints who served their Lord Jesus Christ and His church with their God-given gifts used to the glory of God within His church.

The Lutheran Reformers recognized the importance of remembering the saints as people for whom Christ died, as servants of their Lord in their own times for the continued work of Christ’s church. The Reformers stopped the practice of worshipping the saints and looking to the saints as intercessors, and clearly taught that Christ is our only Intercessor who continually prays for us at God’s Right Hand. There is no place nor teaching in Scripture by which we are commanded to pray to the saints in heaven. Such teaching was purely man-made with no Biblical foundation and an affront to the work and person of Christ our Savior. The Lutheran Church does not worship, pray to, or venerate the saints gone before us in any manner, nor do we look at

them as elevated above other saints, for we are all saints in God's sight through the blood of Jesus (**Romans 1:7**).

Listen closely to the Collect of The Day on any Festival of a Saint, whether martyr or saint who died a natural death; you will see that while we give thanks for the faith given these saints and for their work on earth during their life, there is no worship, nor request of intervention or intercession by the saint that is commemorated because we look only to Christ as Savior as our Intercessor who is our Prophet, Priest and King.

What do we do on The Festival of a particular saint? We praise God for the gift of faith through Christ, for the gifts given to that person for use in Christ's church in a life of faith dedicated to serve Christ, the Savior. Just as we pray upon the death of a Christian, we praise God for the days of earthly life that God granted to that person, for grace bestowed in Christ Jesus, for that person's adoption and rebirth in Holy Baptism and for all the good he or she was permitted to give and receive in this life, to the glory of God all through God's grace in Christ.

Martin Luther said that we are correct to honor the saints when we recognize that they are held up before us as a mirror of God's grace and mercy. Just as Peter, Paul, and other saints, who were sinners like us, were greatly blessed by the grace of God through the gift of faith (**Ephesians 2:8-9**), so also, we are given comfort by their example that God looks on us in mercy and grace even in the infirmity of our human condition. Drawing attention to the faith of the saints draws us to look at our own faith trusting in Christ and call upon Him in every need. (Luther's Works Vol. 40, 300).

Therefore, we joyfully commemorate the saints in thanksgiving to God for the gift of faith given to them who are set before us as people, who despite human weakness, served their Lord and looked with complete trust in Christ the Savior. We too look to Christ our Savior, trusting in His mercy by His death and resurrection. Our trust is in Christ our Savior who Himself is the saint of saints whose sainthood, His perfect life, death, and

resurrection overcomes all human frailty and sin and gives to us, along with the communion of saints gone before with whom we share fellowship forgiveness, life, and salvation.

The hymn writer thanks God for the faith and work of John The Baptist who remained faithful even till the point of death and then ends the verse by pointing to the same Savior John heralded, The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

(LSB 518, stanza 24)

Our thanks for John the Baptist
Who, till his dying day,
Made straight paths for the Savior
And heralded His way!
In witnessing to Jesus
Through times of threat or shame
May we with faith and courage
The Lamb of God proclaim.

In Christ, Pastor Ahrendt

**"The Time
Has Come,"
HE SAID.**  **The Kingdom of GOD
Is Near.
Repent and Believe
the Good News!"**
MARK 1:15