

Here Comes the Bride
Revelation 21:9-11, 22-27
November 4, 2012

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Grace, mercy, and peace from the bridegroom of the Church, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

"Perelandra" is a science fiction novel by C. S. Lewis. It tells the story of Elwin Ransom's travels to Venus, before the planet was corrupted by sin. From the surface of the uncorrupted planet, Ransom looks at earth, which because of its sinfulness, appears to be upside down.

In today's Epistle reading, we have a similar experience. However, unlike Ransom, we are not looking from perfection to imperfection – from Venus to Earth. Today, we stand looking from imperfection to perfection – from planet Sin to the New Jerusalem.

John begins the text with these words: *One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb"* (Rev 21:9 NIV).

The bride, the wife of the Lamb, that John is speaking of is both a place and a people. Later, we will hear John talk about the New Jerusalem and, while that sounds like a place, it is also a reference to the Church – the body of all believers. God's Church is wherever God is with his people. So, that doesn't limit God's Church to a particular building or a particular type of architecture.

In the new Creation, God and his people will be everywhere. Consequently, all of creation will be God's Church. So, you see, the place and the people become synonymous. It's like saying "America won't back down from terrorism." The people and the place are the same.

Now let's look at the bride, the wife of the lamb. Keep in mind that while the New Jerusalem is a place, the important thing is the people who inhabit that place.

All of us, both men and women, are the bride of Christ. To understand what that means, since in today's world there can be male brides, we must understand what Scripture says about husbands.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul tells how husbands are to act toward their brides. *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her* (Eph 5:25 NIV). Whether you are a man or a woman, Jesus treated you like his bride and he gave himself up for you.

Jesus gave himself up for you when he gave up his glory to be conceived as a human, born to a peasant girl, and laid in a crude feeding trough. Jesus gave himself up for you when he lived a life of service to others; teaching, preaching, healing, and obeying God's Law perfectly. Then, because you are his bride, Jesus took upon himself the sin of the whole world, including your sin. He ultimately gave himself up for you when he became the Lamb of God and was slaughtered on your behalf.

So, Jesus is the perfect husband. You are his bride. The question of the day is: "What kind of bride are you?" Let's do a little soul searching. Have you been faithful, forsaking all others and clinging only to Christ?

None of us are perfect and none of us will ever be perfect on this side of the grave. But the question of bride-ship isn't a question about your inborn sinful nature which you cannot change. The question of bride-ship concerns willful sin. Adultery is a willful sin.

It is always a good exercise for every Christian to sit down and ponder his or her life. We all should be on full alert; watching carefully and deliberately to be sure no thing, sinful or otherwise, sneaks into our lives and occupies a more important place than our husband, Jesus Christ. Anytime we value something more than our Lord, we commit spiritual adultery. A quick read through the Old Testament will show how often God referred to the idolatry of the Israelites as adultery.

Some here today may have experienced the sting of an unfaithful spouse. Others have been blessed with a faithful spouse, but can well imagine how deep the pain of infidelity can go. At one time or another, we have all been unfaithful to Jesus. The reason for our soul searching is to be sure we don't subject our Savior to that pain again.

That's a rather sobering thought, isn't it? We have all been unfaithful. We have all hurt Jesus by our adultery with earthly wealth, earthly fame, earthly status, and earthly love for others and ourselves. But that's enough bad news. This is All Saint's Day, so let's look at this issue through Christ's eyes to see why this is such a glorious day.

For all of our unfaithfulness, Jesus remains faithful. Jesus promised to never leave us or forsake us, and Jesus cannot break his promise. As Paul tells us in his letter to the Ephesians: *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless* (Eph 5:25-27 NIV).

All this love means that Jesus forgives us for all our past unfaithfulness. That is why the Gospel is often referred to as the Good News. Knowing we are completely forgiven is Good News and it has four very important implications for our lives.

- § We don't have to torment ourselves over the past. Before he understood the truth about Christ's forgiveness, Martin Luther used to beat himself unconscious because his sinfulness tormented him so. But we know we are forgiven, so we can put the past behind us.
- § We don't have to worry about Jesus bringing up our past. Only God has the ability to completely forget our sin and Jesus is God. He forgets the sins he forgives.
- § Our sins are removed as far as the east is from the west. That means we don't have to drag them around with us. What Christ forgives is gone.
- § We are new creations. Through the waters of Holy Baptism we have a new start. And every time we confess and repent, we are forgiven and Jesus gives us a new lease on life.

Why are all these benefits yours, even though you have been an unfaithful bride? Because Jesus loves you just as much today as he did the day he died on that cross for you. Because Jesus loves you just as much today as he did when he saw you before the creation of the universe.

In our text for today, John continued with these words: *And [the angel] carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God* (Rev 21:10-11 NIV).

As I said earlier, the New Jerusalem is more than a place. It is also God's Church. It is God's people. It is you. God made you to be his New Jerusalem. Jesus became lowly so you could be made lofty. Jesus took your sin so he could give you his purity. Jesus entered your darkness so he could give you his light.

This has been your destiny since before the beginning of time. God has chosen you not only to be his holy city but he has also chosen you to live in his holy city – forever. Listen to God telling you this through Paul: *[God] predestined us to be adopted as his sons [and daughters] through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will* (Eph 1:5 NIV). *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified* (Rom 8:29-30 NIV).

The last part of our text tells us: *[The New Jerusalem's] brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal* (Rev 21:11 NIV).

At Creation, the first thing God created was light. Three days later, God created the heavenly bodies that shine and reflect that light.

When Jesus died on the cross, darkness covered the land; not only did darkness come upon the land, it also came upon the hearts of the disciples. But on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead. The darkness was gone. The light of glory shown through him.

On this All Saints' Day, we remember those whose third day has come. We celebrate their first day, when they were born. We celebrate their second day, the day they were baptized into the family of God. And we celebrate their third day, when, having finished their lives on earth as God's holy city, they now live forever in God's holy city.

We also remember that our third day is coming. The day when God will take each of us from this dark world to be his new creation in his new creation. We look forward to the day when we will shine with the glory that is ours because we are the bride of the Lamb.

On this All Saint's Day let us pray, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus."