

*In the name of the Father, and of the T Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

In C.S. Lewis's book *The Great Divorce*—a story about life in heaven—

there's a sort of procession, or a parade of Spirits,

*“who danced and scattered flowers” and “between them went musicians:*

*and after these a lady in whose honour all this was being done.”<sup>1</sup>*

She was beautiful: bright beams of light emanated from every part of her body,

and *“merriment danced in her eyes.”*

The character who encountered her only partly remembers *“the unbearable beauty of her face.”*

He wonders who it is—St. Mary, a queen, *“a person of particular importance?”* he asks.

His teacher responds,

*“Not at all...*

*It's someone ye'll never have heard of.*

*Her name on Earth was Sarah Smith and she lived at Golders Green.”*

Sarah Smith of Golders Green—that's all she was—

a woman with an ordinary name from an ordinary place,

now seen in extraordinary splendor.

It's easy to sympathize with the man's wonder, then, at why she was so decked in beauty,

and for whom there was a parade of Spirits and light.

The guide goes on to say,

*“Ye have heard that fame in this country and fame on Earth are two quite different things...*

*Every young man or boy that met her became her son—*

*even if it was only the boy that brought the meat to her back door.*

*Every girl that met her was her daughter...for her motherhood was of a different kind.*

*Those on whom it fell went back to their natural parents loving them more.*

*Few men looked on her without becoming, in a certain fashion, her lovers.*

*But it was the kind of love that made them not less true, but truer, to their own wives...*

*Every beast and bird that came near her had its place in her love.*

*In her they became themselves.*

*And now the abundance of life she has in Christ from the Father flows over into them...*

*There is joy enough in the little finger of a great saint such as yonder lady*

*to waken all the dead things of the universe into life.”*

Today we celebrate the Feast Day of All Saints.

And while that includes the likes of those hanging on the walls of this church—

Adam and Melchizedek,

Abraham and Isaac,

Ruth and Naomi and the Prophets, on the one side,

John and Mary,

Simeon and Anna,

Matthew, and Peter, and the Apostles and Evangelists on the other—

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: HarperOne, 1946, 2000), 117-27.

it also includes all the Sarah Smiths of Golders Green from this world.

That is, those who may never become president or captain or even mom-of-the-year,  
     whose lives are, by no quantifiable means, extraordinary, or particularly important,  
     may, nevertheless, be found in such splendor that, if encountered,  
     one might be tempted to fall down and worship them.

These are the Saints, the holy ones, bright with the holiness derived from the eternal light,  
     who is Christ Himself.

But here...now...they're ordinary—

    marked, more often, with the darkness of shame and death, than the light of life.

Here they suffer and mourn,

    there they are comforted and rejoice.

Here they hunger and thirst,

    there they are fed and nourished.

Here they're poor in spirit, meek, and merciful,

    there they inherit the earth and the kingdom and receive mercy.

Here they're persecuted,

    there theirs is the kingdom, and they're free.

St. John captured the sense of these *beatitudes* beautifully both in his Epistle and his Revelation.

He says,

*“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared;  
     but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him.”* (1 Jn 3:2)

And in the Revelation he sees the saints dressed in white, with palm branches in hand.

*“A great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages”*—  
     ordinary folks, like you and me—

*“standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”* (Rev 7:9)

The sight of them is incredible.

They sing, they praise, they worship;

    and yet their own glory and splendor is such that you’d think they’re kings and queens—

    those who were of particular importance.

*“Who are these, clothed in white robes,”* the elder asked, *“and from where have they come?”*

Must’ve come from wealth and power, right?

No.

*“These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation.”*

That is, these are the ones who have suffered—

    the persecuted and oppressed,

    the meek and the poor,

    those hungering and thirsting for righteousness, but finding none.

These are those who have died to themselves and whose life is hidden together with God in Christ.

They’re robes aren’t their own, but those given to them, washed in the blood of Christ.

These are the sealed, those whose foreheads bear the sign and the name of Christ.

Though ordinary in this life—

    suffering hunger and thirst and scorching heat—

now the sun shall not strike them and every tear from their eyes is wiped away.  
 Dear Saints of God, this vision of St. John is marvelous—  
 not only for the beauty of this great reversal, a justice rightly to be rejoiced in,  
 but also, and especially because in this revelation, St. John records a vision *of you...*

What you *will be* has not yet appeared in this life;  
 nevertheless, as the children of God, this is who you are:  
 the saints gathered around the throne and before the Lamb.

It may seem a long way off.  
 And you may have many more tears to shed before this day.  
 But take heart!  
 The line that separates us from those who've already gone on to be with Christ is thin,  
 and fading every day.  
 See the reality of who you are as one of the saints of God in Christ—  
 limping along now, but running and leaping in the ever approaching day of our Lord.

You are the baptized.  
 Your fellowship with one another is a fellowship with those like Sarah Smith of Golders Green.  
 It's a fellowship with Abraham & Isaac, Isaiah & Jeremiah, John & Mary, Thomas & Timothy.  
 And the banners that hang with the images of these saints are meant to remind you of this *reality*.  
 You are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.  
 You're not alone.  
 You're not left to fend for yourself in this vale of tears.  
 For all of those pictured are more truly here than you know.  
 And at the center of it all, the one around whom both saints and angels gather,  
 is Christ the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And here you are—having entered heaven itself—  
 with angels, and archangels, and all the company of heaven,  
 gathered around the throne of the Lamb,  
 clothed in white Baptismal robes,  
 crying out with a loud voice:  
 “*Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!*”  
 “*Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might  
 be to our God forever and ever! Amen.*”

All is His.  
 And He is yours.  
 Blessed are you, for your reward is great in heaven.

*In the name of the Father, and of the T Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*