I hope you're well rested after last night's extra hour of sleep. I know I sure enjoyed it! It comes at just the right time for kids and parents alike who are tired out after engaging in some spirited and strenuous trick-or-treating and even for those of us who just stayed at home and handed out candy! Speaking of yesterday, not only was it Halloween, but it was also Reformation Day. October 31st, 1517, is commemorated as the beginning of the Lutheran Reformation. That movement set in motion by Martin Luther's posting of the 95 theses on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg had at its goal making all people aware of the great freedom that's found in the pure teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Namely, that we are saved from sin, death, and the devil by God's grace alone, through faith in Christ alone, as taught in God's Word alone.

But it was not always smooth sailing through life for Martin Luther. Far from it. Luther may have changed the course of European history, but behind closed doors, running the Protestant Reformation took a massive toll on his mental health. The Pope was after him, the emperor had it out for him, he was surrounded by critics, and many of his own colleagues were bickering among themselves. In short, Martin Luther was feeling the immense pressure that came with being a major reformer of the Church, a professor, a pastor, and a father. And on top of it all, he was in excruciating pain from kidney stones. The story is told how one day as he moped around the house muttering underneath his breath, the story goes that his wife Katie declared in a solemn voice, "God is dead." Luther looked at his dear wife with bewilderment and retorted, "God is ***not dead***!" Katie then went on to say, 'It sure ***seems*** like God is dead by the way you are acting.' Martin thanked his beloved wife and then he went and etched a Latin word on to the top of his desk: Vivit. Vivit means, "He lives." Whenever things were looking bleak and Luther was tempted to complain, he would look at that one little word and he was refreshed and revitalized. "Vivit- He lives!" Because Jesus lives Luther knew he had every reason to be joyful.

Today, ***we*** have every reason to be joyful, too. ***Today*** is a special day on the church's calendar: All Saints Sunday. It's a time when we remember and give thanks to God for those who've gone on before us into heaven. Instead of only being sad because our loved ones are separated from us for now, we can ***rejoice***, because just like Jesus, they too, ***live***!

In the Epistle today from 1st John, our reason for rejoicing is made very clear. We can be joyful no matter the circumstance, because we are children of

God. And because we will soon exchange the crosses we bear in this life for a crown in heaven, we truly can be filled with joy!

In the opening verse of our text the apostle John reminds me of a little kid who has just received a surprise package in the mail. He's hardly able to contain his excitement as he exclaims: "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God"! (1 John 3:1a) Do ***we*** get that excited when think about God's love? How about in the Divine Service, right after you've heard the absolution, the announcement that your sins have truly been forgiven, do you sing the Hymn of Praise with gusto... or with sort of polite indifference? Just how ***great*** is God's love? ***Is*** it something that fills you with joy or not? (pause)

If you had a pet dog that became rabid and suddenly attacked your family, what would you do? Would you keep it? Would you let it have free reign of your house, eat at your table, and sleep in your bed? No! You'd probably have no choice but to put the dog to sleep. You certainly wouldn't send away one of your children so you could keep the dog! Yet that's what God did. He sent His Son away to die on the cross so that He could adopt us sinful, rebellious people and welcome us into His home! It's no wonder St. John exclaimed: "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God." (1 John 3:1a)

Since God has adopted us into His family, we should expect to receive good things from Him, right? I mean if we were adopted into the family of a billionaire, we would expect to drive a fancy car, wear the best name-brand clothes, and live on room service. Should we expect anything less from God? So, why then don't ***we*** live the glamorous life of the rich and famous? Could it be that we're really ***not*** God's children? **No**. Our baptism and the faith God created or strengthened there assure us that we ***are*** His children. So why isn't life sweeter for us who are members of God's family? One reason is because the world doesn't know that we are God's children. St. John writes, "The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him." (1 John 3:1b). Think of how the world treated Jesus: many laughed and scoffed at His claim to be the Son of God. The chief priests eventually had Him arrested, put on trial, and condemned Him to death. Then they turned Jesus over to the Pontius Pilate to be mocked and flogged and crucified. Yes, they cruelly beat Him and murdered Him. Well, if that's the way the world treated Jesus, should we really expect to be treated any better?

That's why Jesus Himself says in our Gospel today, "***Blessed*** are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of

heaven. Blessed are ***you*** when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on ***my*** account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matt 5: 10-12)

While we can understand that we'll be persecuted and mocked by unbelievers, we may sometimes wonder why God doesn't at least protect us from diseases and accidents and injuries if we really are His children? The Bible makes it clear though that God ***uses*** those things that happen because we live in a sinful world to purify our faith and make it stronger. In a way, we're like diamonds; rough diamonds. Before we can shine with brilliance we need to be expertly cut and polished. That's what God is doing with the trials He allows into our life. But ***don't worry***. God will never cut us so deeply that we lose our faith – at least not so that it would be God's fault should that happen. He paid a very dear price to make you His child and He promises that the cross you now carry, whatever struggle it is, you will soon exchange it for a crown! Because Jesus rose again from the dead, we will live also!

Even right now, God is preparing us for a spectacular future where we'll receive a heavenly crown. John says as much in our text, "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, because we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2). John wants us to be certain that God has something far better in store for us than the life we now live in this world. Exactly what that is, we don't know just yet. But we will certainly find out when Christ appears! What an incredible day that will be when we get to see Jesus with our own eyes and see Him as He really is in His magnificent glory. What a day it will be when we get to see our loved ones in the Christian faith and all the saints who have gone before us. That will definitely be an overwhelming, joyous sight. Consider how John described them in our reading today from the book of Revelation. "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"" (Revelation 7:9-10).

And that's just a sneak peak of heaven! While we don't know exactly what that place of unimaginable beauty, peace, and love will be like, (or even what ***we*** will be like when we get there), we do know that "Never again will (we) hunger; never again will (we) thirst. The sun will not beat upon (us), nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be (our)

shepherd; he will lead (us) to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from (our) eyes" (Rev. 7: 16-17 NIV).

How awe-inspiring that will be! Vivit! He lives, and because Jesus lives, we will live also. Because Jesus lives, our loved ones in the faith will live forever, also. Because Jesus lives, He empowers us to live our lives for Him now, He forgives us when we sin and turn back to Him, and all the while He leads us now on this earth until we arrive at our destination in heaven. That's what comes with being a saint, God's holy child, now and forever. And it's all because "Vivit!" He lives! Amen!