

All Saints Sunday
November 3, 2024
Isaiah 25:6-9, Psalm 24
Revelation 21:1-6a John 11:32-44

For All the Saints

Good morning, and welcome to the celebration of All Saints Day at St. Ambrose! All Saints Day, also known as All Hallows Day, Hallowmas, and the Solemnity of all Saints, has a long history in the church going back centuries.

From the 4th century on, commemorations of martyrs and saints were held on various dates near Easter and Pentecost. In the early 9th century, some churches in the British Isles began celebrating this feast day on November 1, and later in that century Pope Gregory IV authorized this date for the whole Roman Catholic Church. After the Reformation, the custom of celebrating the feast was retained in the Lutheran, Anglican, and some Methodist churches. It is held on November 1, or the Sunday closest to November 1st, and honors and commemorates the lives of all those, living or dead, known, or unknown,

who have put their trust in Christ and sought to follow him as his disciples.

Who do you think of when you think of a saint? I imagine for many of us images of austere, robed figures wearing haloes and enshrined in stained glass come to mind! Perhaps we think of saints who were particularly holy people who lived a long time ago, who renounced the world to live out their faith. Maybe we think of the long line of the holy ones who were formally canonized by the Roman Catholic Church. And maybe we think of them as a lot different from us, on a different plane, living a way of life that would be impossible for us. But I want to tell you, if you want to see saints, just turn around in your pew, right now, where you are sitting, and look. You are sitting next to a saint! And you are one, too! You are one, too. You, and you, and you, you are the saints of God, God's beloved, blessed ones! In the 2nd chapter of Peter, Verse 9, it is written of the believers: "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Throughout the centuries,

those who have been faithful to God, who seek to walk in the ways of Jesus, are saints. Not perfect people, not people who have renounced the world, but ordinary folks like you and me, people who struggle with sin and temptation, people who suffer and are broken, people who are gifted and wounded, and yet joyful, people who have chosen to weave their story into the Great Story of the one who goes before us, Jesus the Christ!

So today we remember giants of the faith, the apostles and martyrs, and St Mary, St. Francis, St. Clare, St. Teresa of Avila. St. Ignatius. We honor the modern saints of our time, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Rosa Parks, Mother Teresa, the martyrs of El Salvador. And we cherish the memory of those countless ordinary folks whose sanctity is known to God alone, but whose prayers, whose kindness, whose compassion has touched many hearts and shines with the beauty of true humility. We remember them, the teachers who encouraged, the neighbors who brought over hot food and a listening ear for the grieving, the store clerk who paid for the item the homeless person couldn't afford. They are the ones of whom Jesus said "When

you did it for the least of these, you did it for me.” These are indeed the saints of God.

And today, we also honor our faithful departed, the saints who lived and loved among us. While we take comfort that they are safe in God’s care, we still mourn them. We can no longer see them, embrace them or hear their voices. And yet, we know that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God, and that love never ends. Be assured that those we have loved and see no more are very much alive, safe in the household of God, and that their love for us and ours for them is a shining, unbreakable bond.

All Saint’s Day is also about celebrating the Communion of Saints. The Catechism of the Episcopal Church describes the Communion of Saints as the whole family of God, the living and the dead, bound together in Christ in love by sacrament, prayer and praise. The Communion of Saints, then, is the living body of those who have trusted in God for salvation and wholeness. Because the bond we have with those who have gone before transcends the limits of time and space, we are forever united with them. They are our forbearers in the faith, and

their love and example can cheer us and encourage us on the way. As we can read in Hebrews 12:2, all of us saints, living and dead, “fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning the shame, and sits down at the right hand of God’s throne.” For the Communion of Saints is all those saints whose path streams with light, whose faith sustains us, guides us, and strengthens us as we seek to grow more and more into the likeness of Christ here on earth.

Finally, our Scriptures appointed for today tell us how the abundance of God’s love and life bind the living and those who have gone before in a beloved community of hope. In our reading from Isaiah, we have the image of the mountain of the Lord, of God’s revelation, Mt Sinai, being a place for the gathering of all peoples, a place where there is feasting and rejoicing, and where the shroud of fear and loss and death will be lifted up forever. Those who are weeping will have their tears dried and will know sorrow and sadness no more. The God that we have long waited for, in times of darkness and despair, comes to be with us, and there is much rejoicing. Those who were far

off are brought near, those in exile are brought home, and all God's people will gather in joy on God's holy mountain. The words of the Psalm assure us that this earth is the dwelling place of God, and it is the place where the King of Glory shall come in to dwell and bring gladness to all his people.

In the reading from the book of Revelation, we hear that the "home of God is among mortals, and that God dwells with us." The covenant is restored, we are God's people, and he is our God. Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, comes to dwell with the living on earth, and then lifts our humanity, healed, and transformed, into heaven. Crying and pain will pass away, and we will know the joy of union with each other and with God. For Jesus, the Holy One of God is indeed the beginning, the end, and our hope and strength in this life, and in the life of the world to come. He is making all things new, and nothing can ever separate us from his love.

And in the reading from the Gospel of John, we experience Jesus as very human, mourning and weeping at the loss of his dear friend. And yet, in him, the divine life bubbles over, and overflows with healing

and light, and death can't withstand it. "Come out, he cries to Lazarus, and all of us down the ages who are held fast in our own tombs. Come out! And we, too, blink in the glorious light and are transformed! We, too, know the abundance of life that swallows up death.

I would like to conclude with 2 of the verses of that wonderful hymn we sang at the opening of our service. Let these words sweep over you and fill your hearts. "O blest communion, fellowship divine! We feebly struggle, they in glory shine; yet all are one in thee for all are thine, Alleluia, Alleluia! But lo, there breaks a yet more glorious day; the saints triumphant rise in bright array; the King of glory passes on his way. Alleluia, Alleluia! Those who have gone before shine in glory and offer their love to encourage and strengthen us. And the procession of all the saints who have gone before pass by with the king of glory. May we all take our place in that procession of abundant life in this world, and grace and glory in the life to come! Amen.

