

Sermon - All Saints/Souls
11/5/23

In the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

This past week on Wednesday and Thursday, the Church honored the Feasts of All Saints and All Souls. In the Middle Ages, these Feasts were known as the beginning of the “dark half of the year.” They are six months precisely from May Day - the recognized beginning of spring. The days in the north are shorter. Mornings surprise us on those first steps out the doorway as the chill from the evening persists. Illuminated pumpkins line the porch steps, and soon - though hopefully not too soon - the lights of the Advent season will brighten the winter.

This brief little season of Hallowtide - All Hallow’s Eve, All Saints Day, and All Souls Day - hovers in a sort of middle space. It is a season between the seasons. These days are a liturgical bridge from the celebration of life to the remembrance of death. The year grows dark - and yet - and yet there is a particular tending of the light. These sister Feasts - All Saints and All Souls - teach us something about remembering those who have loved God before us. They help us to recall our past, both as individuals and as a Church. And they are also a re-authorship of time and space as we know it.

I do not mean to suggest that this is all some particularly pious episode of Star Trek. This is the mind of God. As human beings, we think in terms of a linear time that evolves - one day to the next - and we think of space as being the locations right in front of us, or perhaps somewhere far away - but still able to be plotted and discovered on a map. We think in three dimensions - near, far, here, there. And we think in terms of the passage of time: now. Back then. In the future. But on All Saints and All Souls, we encounter a glimpse of a greater truth. We touch the edges of something holier and suffused with promise. We set aside our earthly limitations, and permit our hearts to be turned toward the vastness and perfection of God.

Traditionally, All Saints Day is a day in the church for baptisms. During the baptismal liturgy, the blessing over the water proclaims this: We thank you, Father, for the water of Baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit.” Later the congregation welcomes the newly baptized, declaring together: “We receive you into the household of God. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood.”

These words, too, show us the mind of God. It is only appropriate that baptisms are often celebrated on this holy day, for in baptism, our own selves - our souls and bodies - shake free from the bonds of time and space to become destined for union with Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. A new life. A new love. A new light in the darkness.

And so in baptism we are welcomed into fellowship with the communion of saints. And this is not some exercise in high theology, this is a great and immediate gift. This is a transformation. Because when we enter into fellowship with the communion of saints, a few remarkable things happen:

First, we are never alone. We are never left to fend for ourselves in our journey toward holiness or hopefulness. We are accompanied by the ones who have come before us and the ones who God has placed alongside us who show us the way. We are not the only one left to tend the lamps. We have friends in heaven, who behold God face to face, and who cheer us on and pick us up and hold our prayers before Jesus on the throne of glory by which they sing their songs of praise. We are never, ever alone. And while of course it is Jesus who knows us first and best, what a blessing it is to have others who love him with us.

Second, we are called to sainthood too. This is true. I remember I had a teacher once who would say this to my class, and I’d look around and think, yeah right. There is no way this

collection of heathens is going to become saints. But I was wrong. Because saints aren't perfect people. They aren't angels or superhuman demi-gods. They are simply people of faith who continue, throughout their lives, to say "yes" to loving God. They may do brave things or smart things or holy things - but all of those things are simply parts of what it means for them to say "yes" when God calls them. They continue in love, and sometimes they stumble, but sanctity is the slow, steady work of a continuous "yes" to the Living God.

And third: when we enter into fellowship with the communion of saints, we come to know Jesus Christ – in a vibrant and glorious way. We come to see how Jesus' love was made known to his very first apostles. We see how the grace of Christ covered those in those first monastic communities in the Egyptian desert. We see how the Resurrection inspired great deeds in nobles and kings, but also how that same promise blossomed in the hearts of unknown little girls who led armies, joined convents, had families, prayed faithfully, left all they had and turned to serve the Lord. We see how new birth in baptism inspired some to turn away from lives of selfishness and violence, and we see how there is not a gender, race, age, location, circumstance, or shuttered heart into which God cannot speak of grace.

On these Feasts, we remember that the heart of each saint is a bright prism through which shines the light of Christ. In their fellowship, even this dark half of the year is blessed by a radiant hope indeed.

Amen.