Dear Friends in Christ

At the beginning of November, we celebrate All Saints' Day. This festival always had to do with little saints—those who did not have their own day to be remembered and reverenced. It was part of the "cult of the saints" in which job descriptions and areas of responsibility were attributed to certain saints and they were prayed to. Lutherans had no problem with remembering saints, being inspired by them, and seeing them as role models, but the praying to saints felt like pagan practices that were brought into the church. In the Augsburg Confession of 1530, Lutherans drew the line at praying to saints rather than praying to Christ.

Article XXI. Of the Worship of the Saints

1 Of the Worship of Saints they teach that the memory of saints may be set before us, that we may follow their faith and good works, according to our calling, as the Emperor may follow the example of David in making war to drive away the Turk from his country.

2 For both are kings. But the Scripture teaches not the invocation of saints or to ask help of saints, since it sets before us the one Christ as the Mediator, Propitiation, High Priest, and Intercessor.

3 He is to be prayed to, and has promised that He will hear our prayer; and this worship He approves above all, to wit, that in all afflictions He be called upon, 1 John 2:1:

4 If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, etc.

So what do we do with All Saints' Day? We celebrate the little saints through whom God has blessed our lives. I have a list of Sunday School teachers, pious lay leaders, choir members, even Bible Study participants who have been a blessing to me through the decades. I have read any number of Christian writers and marveled at the witness of Christians in difficult or oppressive circumstances who keep the faith. When I sing For All the Saints, I am pretty much remembering them. I encourage you to do the same.

At the end of November, we have Christ the King Sunday. Messiah translates pretty fairly to King. If we were to modernize the festival's name, things would get messy. Christ the President, Christ the Prime Minister, Christ the Dictator, Christ the CEO each have problems associated with them, and none of these titles is adequate in translating Messiah. They all miss the point of the day which is to insist that no secular government or secular leader or local narcissist has ultimate claim on our loyalty and obedience. Christ, and Christ alone, as the one who loved us and gave himself for us has our ultimate loyalty, obedience and trust. That is the point of this final Sunday of the Church year. As Ephesians 3 puts it, "20 But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself."

Yours in Christ,

John Shepherd McKenzie