

Happy All Saints Day!

For some of us here this evening, this major feast of the Church is an old friend, so to speak. We gather every year as a time to remember all the saints, but especially those saints we know and love, those who have gone before us; as the Book of Common Prayers states, “...for all those whom we love but see no longer.” For us, All Saints Day is a special time of remembrance and faith and hope.

For others here this evening, this may be our first All Saints service. You may come from a different faith tradition in which it is not observed. Or even if your church did observe it, you may not have thought about it very much. Others here tonight may have no faith or limited faith in a traditional sense.

Regardless of what we believe, for all of us here tonight, I want us to consider what the Church believes about this holy day. And if we come to embrace this faith, how what we believe affects how we live and gives us hope. To begin that reflection, I want to offer a prayer from a perhaps unexpected part of the prayer book—the marriage liturgy. In that joyful setting in which we celebrate and anticipate new life, there is a lovely prayer that gives greater depth to that service and informs what we believe about All Saints Day. Let me read it for you:

*“Grant that the bonds of our common humanity, by which **all** your children are united one to another, **and the living to the dead**, may be so transformed by your grace, that your will may be done on earth as it is in heaven; where, O Father, with your Son, and the Holy Spirit, you live and reign in perfect unity, now and for ever. Amen.”*

What a lovely prayer. Have you noticed it before? I hope we do more weddings than funerals next year so we can hear it often. Regardless of what service we participate in—weddings, funerals, Holy Baptism, Holy Eucharist—there is an underlying belief that connects them all, that connects **us**.

Because God became human in Christ and because Christ rose from the dead-- we all share in a new humanity, what the Apostles Creed calls “the Communion of Saints.” That Communion of Saints is not limited to people on earth with us right now. It is so much bigger than that. In fact, it is limited mainly by the boundaries of our faithful imagination.

Because God became human, Christ redeemed humanity and transformed what being human means, so that we all share a common connection now. All of us—those of

us who are baptized, those who believe in Jesus; those who have done heroic acts of courage and those who have done loving acts of service; and those of us who are just getting by, struggling to keep the faith, struggling to do what's right; or struggling even to know what's right. God sees us—all of us-- as connected to one another as God's children.

And if we are open to it, God sees people connected that we might not imagine as part of this communion of God's children—people of other faiths, other political beliefs; people in prison, people with addictions; people who are angry for good reasons and not so good reasons; people who are afraid or anxious. God sees us—all of us-- as more than our worst moments or our weakest flaws; and God loves us. God responds to our worst acts, the times when we fall short, with many more thousands of acts of mercy and grace. That is what God sees when God sees us. That is how deeply God loves us.

All Saints Day celebrates that truth. It is such a splendid Christian holiday. It is so much more than “trick or treat” or adult parties that can get a little crazy. Those peripheral parts of the holiday are fine and they can be fun—but they can be a distraction, too. There is so much more depth of life available to us who believe if we flip the calendar one more day from Halloween to this holy day.

So today we have hope. We have connection in Christ. All those whom we love-- like Bruce, Ralph, Harold, Marilyn, Tom, Lohr, and Rosa who died in the past year in our parish. And all the other loved ones we remember tonight whether recently or from years ago. Though the pain of our loss remains with us, our faith gives us hope that the pain we suffer now is not final or total. Through Christ, one day we will be with our loved ones again. And until that day, through our prayer, we can keep that connection.

The prayer book teaches us that because our loved ones continue to abide in our hearts and in God's love, we can continue to pray for them, talk with them, as we hope for them to grow in God's love. Through the mystery of Christ and the Communion of Saints, our connection is not limited by time or space-- or even death.

In a few moments, as we offer our prayer together, we will read the names of those we listed who have died in the past year. Some, all of us will know; some only a few will know. But together we will pray for all of them with the hope that they are continuing to grow in the love of God—and that we will follow them one day as we continue to grow in God's love, too.

After those prayers, we will have a time of silence and then come forward to light candles in memory of those we love and remember. We will take your time. Know that each candle lit represents the prayers of the saints—us praying for them and them praying for us. Together we will sit in the light of those prayers this night and remember our connection with those we love.

And remember that God does see our human family as one. We will talk more about that part of our belief in All Saints this coming Sunday morning and Monday evening. But tonight, we will rest in hope and find comfort that we are one, the living and the dead. Amen.