

Saint Thomas' of the Air Church
 All Saints Day
 November 1, 2020
 rmceely+

Blessed are ye
 when men shall revile you and persecute you
 and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely
 for my sake.

Rejoice and be exceeding glad:
 for great is your reward in heaven.

Fall is such a mysterious time
 Filled with beauty,
 Melancholy
 And the macabre.

The golden afternoon light
 Filtered through the blazing beauty of the changing trees
 Bright yellows, brilliant reds and deep purples,
 Evokes the fragility and the fleeting nature of life,
 As Christians we look beyond to the eternal.

As Anglicans we prepare for the eternal harvest festival of God:
 All Saints Day.

The Saints, those glorious characters
 Often friends, or family
 Point to God's eternity beyond time; Heaven.

We celebrate today the octave of All Saints.

The Church marks the great feasts
 by observing them for 8 days; an *octave*,
 a day of preparation we call an *eve*
 and a Proper Preface to be chanted
 at the Sanctus of the Mass.

All Saints Day has gone by a number of names over the centuries:
 the Feast of All Saints
 All Hallows Day, and
 Allhallows
 Hallowsmas

Hallow as in “Hallowed by thy name” is an old English word that meant: to make holy or sacred.

Yesterday we celebrated

All Hallows Eve, the day preceding All Hallows Day
 But for our secular friends it was only

Halloween

Which has become the second great festival
 For the American public.

In this era of conflict, cultural confusion, isolation
 unemployment and violence

Americans celebrate the darkness of Halloween
 Rather than the light of Easter.

The former Archbishop of Paris said:

“The West is born in Christianity,

The crisis of the West is that it isn’t Christian anymore.”

And so our culture separates All Hallows Eve from All Hallows
 Day.

Our fallen culture prefers to focus on the dark side of man
 Forgetting the victory of the good
 found in the loving hearts of the saints.

Archbishop Morse wrote:

“The problem of freedom

is the choice between good and evil

And is particularly reflected in the Feast of All Saints Day.

When man’s understanding is darkened,

He becomes alienated from the life of God.

Today the secular has seized upon the eve, All Hallows Eve
 --Halloween
 and makes it a celebration of evil and the darkness of night.
 The church celebrates the light of day
 and makes it a harvest of Heaven; the Saints.”

The 8 day feast of All Saints begins with a three-day observance:
 All Hallows Eve – a time to prepare for All Hallows
 All Saints Day – a time to commemorate all the saints
 All Souls Day (tomorrow) a time to remember all the
 Faithful Departed.

This year we will celebrate two of the three
 All Saints Day today, and
 All Souls Day tomorrow at 6 PM
 At the St Thos of the Air Church
 Truly, our life in the church is so rich and full

All Saints Day has been observed since the 4th Century.
 When the Church recognized that
 countless men and women
 had been persecuted, martyred
 literally hunted and tortured for their faith in Jesus
 sometimes to the delight of the crowds.

Their names were not recorded in history
 But we should remember and honor them nonetheless.
 Recall the sacrifices of the nameless thousands.
 This day was originally set aside to commemorate them,
 their sacrifice and what it means in our lives.

The English word “saint” comes from the same Latin root that
 forms our words
 sacred,
 sanctuary, and sanctify:
sanctus. Which means
 to set apart and devoted to the exclusive purpose of God.

So this is the Sanctuary of the Church,
 a place we physically set apart
 from the rest of the church building
 and devoted exclusively to the worship of God.
 That's why the altar is here,
 that's why the credence table with the elements for
 communion are here.

That's why we receive communion here.
 Nothing happens in this space that does not involve God.
 Of all the real estate in San Francisco
 We have set it apart and dedicated it to God.

So, Saints are people who set their lives apart to devote themselves
 to the purpose of doing God's will.

We think of Saints four ways:

1. All Saints Day and its octave, is a time to look back
 at the lives of Saints who have been formally canonized
 by the Roman Church and adopted by the Anglican Church:
 The way they lived their lives
 and for some, their martyred deaths.

In the days before Comic Books, Movies and electronic screens,
 the Saints were the Superheroes.

But they were not fiction
 The product of paint, celluloid, pixels and imagination
 They were flesh and blood
 people whose
 heroic actions
 Saved us, motivated us
 and were the examples for our lives.

Their names and lives and accomplishments were well known
 And celebrated both by the Church
 And Society at large.

They were lights of the world in their several generations.
 They were the choice vessels of God's grace,
 because they sought to do their duty
 in that state of life unto which God had been pleased to call
 them.

There are fascinating stories,
 there are Kings,
 there are paupers,
 there are priests and soldiers.
 some of the most unlikely people.

Too many stories to tell this morning.
 But their lives and the ways they led them remain
 instructive to our lives
 and to how we might lead them.

2. Our remembrance at All Saints also includes
 Those who were never formally sainted
 but who devoted themselves
 to the love of God
 and who lived their lives
 "following the Commandments of God and walking in His holy
 ways"
 as we say in the invitation to the general confession.
 Nameless men and women who gave their lives
 And were martyred for their faith.

These Saints include all those untold millions
 who live eternally with our Lord.
 Some of them it has been our fortune to know
 and their lives have guided and inspired us

3. The concept of saints includes our ancestors, departed relatives and loved ones.

We remember them tomorrow evening.

And will pray for their eternal peace with God.

In times not so long ago, tomorrow would be the day each year

That we would visit their graves

Decorate them with flowers, poems, and mementos

We remember them at the All Souls service

Offer thanksgiving for their

Lives, works and examples for our lives.

However, in the Anglican tradition, the concept of saints is broader still.

4. It includes:

people from all over the world,

the people of the here and now,

who love God and carry the way of Christian life to those who will succeed us.

So, you see; The Saints of God lived not only in ages past- not only in the 1st, 10th or 12th centuries but also in these last days. The living:

Today,

right now,

right here.

So, if you are thinking that you too are a saint,
you win the sermon prize,

The difference between us
and the people that were formally recognized as Saints
is only a matter of degree.

The people the Church has formally recognized as Saints
 have set apart a very large part of their lives
 to do God's will
 and we have set apart
 only a tiny part of our lives for Him.

But both set apart a portion of their lives to do God's will. And in
 the Anglican tradition both are saints.

Communion of Saints

All Saints Day embraces the concept of the entire Communion of
 Saints,

In the Communion of Saints, the concept of time is eroded.
 The past and present intersect
 and become one
 in Communion.

So in this communion of Saints, we celebrate every Holy
 Communion in union with all of the saints, past and present.
 People from all over time
 and all over the world,
 all the Saints, join with us,
 the saints here at St Thomas,
 in the organic and living body of Christ; His church;
 in the spiritual union
 in the love of God that takes place in Holy Communion,
 that close union with God.

And we are changed.
 We recite our belief in the Communion of Saints in the Apostles
 creed.

But it is now,
 in the days of All Saints
 that we are encouraged to pause
 and reflect upon the Communion of Saints.

Bishop Morse loved his acolytes and fondly told a story
About one young man who served at the altar.

Morse had just given a sermon on the Communion of Saints
And had emphasized that at every communion
We are joined by Saints from all time
And in all places
In spiritual union here at the altar
In a spiritual cloud of countless Saints.

There comes a time in the service when the acolyte
Tells the priest the number of people who shall
Be coming to the rail so the priest can provide sufficient
Body and Blood for them.

The boy approached the Bishop at the altar
And when asked how many people there were
That boy had listened to every word of the sermon.
And he stammered.... Millions !!.

As we contemplate All Saints Day we may even discover
the special treasure of sanctity and devotion,
which can flourish in any surrounding,
when fostered by faith
and the love of God.

For each feast day of the Church

There has been written what is called a Proper Preface
You'll find them beginning at page 77 of your BCP
It is said or sung at the Sanctus of the service.

The one for All Saints Day sums up the sentiment and
Theology of the Day:

“ Who, in the multitude of thy saints
hast compassed us about
with so great a cloud of witnesses, that we
rejoicing in their fellowship
may run with patience the race that is set before us, and
together with them
may receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away.”

There is a song in our hymnal written by an English woman,
 Lesbia Scott in the 1920s that I chose for the Sermon hymn.
 Its composer was the wife of a British Admiral.

A man who began his career as a warrior
 but who became an Anglican Priest.
 The family lived in England west of London.
 Lesbia established a little family tradition.
 She wrote little songs for her three kids
 about the family events.
 The kids loved it and nagged her
 to write a song for the most mundane things.
 There is even one for a picnic.

This song she wrote for her children, to encourage their faith. She
 never intended it to be published for us,
 but it has become a world wide favorite
 and has been translated into many languages.
 Many of you know it well. She entitled it “Sing a Song for the
 Saints of God”.

It may have been written by their Mom for the Scott Children, but
 it has a sweet message that will do us good as well.

We live in a time that is far different from the violent Christian
 persecutions of the past.

Although recent attacks on Churches
 and religious statues are foreboding.

It is a time when all of us,
 “the Saints of God”,
 in the sense of the Scott family children’s song,
 are called to prayer and more.

So what will good folk do?

We are already doing it, . . . right now. We set apart a portion of
 our lives this morning and dedicated it to do God’s will.

We are a part of the organic body of Christ, his church by virtue of our Baptism.

We come to participate in the Communion of Saints each Sunday and through out the Church year,
we take
and make communion with Him
in this service,
this close union with God.

We can come to Bible study, or read His word and let it affect our lives.

Several of you say the daily offices, Morning Prayer
A stalwart group meet every evening
in St Thomas' Church of the Air
at 6 PM to say Evening Prayer together
All are welcome.

We say our prayers each day, at each meal, and before retiring each night.

And when we take stock of our lives;
especially in these days of All Saints,
and consider the lives of the saints,
those who have been formally sainted
and those who have not;
we may hear God's will.

And may we have the courage to set apart a portion of our lives,
and perhaps a greater part of our lives
to do that will.

If I may borrow from the Scott Children:

For the saints of God are folk just like you

And there's not any reason

No, not the least

Why you shouldn't be one too.

Amen.