

Sermon for All Saints 2020

⁹After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Today we celebrate the festival of All Saints, and as we pray about this, and think about it, we might be tempted to think only of the faithful men and women who have been dead for a very long time. The people who during their life on earth contributed to the church in some fantastic manner. We think mainly of the saints who are recorded in our lectionary, and each year we pray for them by name. We sometimes think of the saints as being people such as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These are the gospel writers. We might include Paul and Peter for they were particularly influential with their writings.

We may give some thought to the horrid manner by which some of the saints were killed for their faith. In the book of Hebrews Paul cites some of these terrible and frightening methods for extinguishing life. Some were tortured, others mocked and flogged, some were in chains and imprisoned, some were stoned, some sawn in two, killed by the sword. Paul was beheaded, Peter was crucified upside down. Thankfully, it is unlikely that we will face this horror in this country, at this time.

The reality is that yes, these people are the saints of the church: but let us not forget that we too are children of God and therefore saints of the church. We are the saints in our age. Of course, very few of us will make it into the Lectionary for annual prayers and feast days; probably none of us will. But this does not negate our importance to God or to the church. There are saints who are dead and will be remembered for their great commitment to the faith. Then there is now, and we are in communion with all of the saints, living and dead.

We proclaim the Communion of Saints every time we say the Apostles Creed, one of the earliest statements of the faith of the church. We state quite clearly that: "I believe in the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting." The communion of saints undoubtedly consists of the saints living and dead.

Scripture raises this very point. When we read the Bible we discover over and over again that we are the children of God. Jesus offering the Sermon on the Mount addresses only the living with a promise for the future. *"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."* Revelation brings our attention to those who have washed their robes in the blood of the lamb and are thereby dressed in white and are purified. The past, present, and future are embraced within the communion of saints. So, when we celebrate this feast, we are rejoicing in the love that God has for his people dating from the time of Abraham, through the present time, and far off into the future. God's love stretches off into eternity.

There can be no doubt that we are God's people in this age, and as God's people we are made Holy. And being made Holy simply means that we have been set apart by God for God's use. We are the instruments of God when we give ourselves to his service. God uses us to reach out to others, to care for others, to convince others about salvation in Christ. God calls us to feed, to nurture, to clothe, to embrace and to love, in God's name.

We have been consecrated into service that is real and fruitful. Therefore, we are the saints of God, for we are followers of Jesus Christ. Each one of us has a vocation to be holy, to be set apart from the world for God's purpose. Our gifts do not need to be spectacular; they simply need to reflect our integrity and compassion. Perfection is the domain of the Godhead. We shall never achieve it in this life. God calls us to be true to ourselves and to be true to God.

Our role is one of honesty, compassion, prayerfulness, sincerity, hopefulness, generosity, and humility. These qualities will set us apart from the sinfulness of the world. As the saints of God, we strive to emulate the character of Christ. But, as I have already said, we shall not be perfect at it. The key word is "strive". We strive to be Christlike.

St Paul writes to the various saints of the church in his time. He calls them, "*those who are called saints.*" He proclaims the gentiles to be fellow citizens with the saints. This means that the Gentiles are saints. Invariably he will acknowledge that all the saints greet you. These are the saints who are alive and active within the various churches.

So what is expected of us? Matthew records it in the gospel today. Blessed, meek, or happy are those who strive to live an Holy life. Blessed are the poor, the bereaved, the hungry, the merciful, the pure in heart, and those who are persecuted. All of these raise within us an understanding that God is in all things and that we are to trust God. We are to exhibit the signs of the one who follows the example of Christ. We are to be people of compassion, and generosity; we are to be honest, and we are to seek justice for all people. We are to seek the truth regardless of the cost.

We may not be remembered by name as one of the great saints. But we will be remembered as the generation of saints in this age who constantly searched for communion with God and with all the saints.