

# ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως: All Saints (A) (1 Nov 2020)

St. Thomas', Glassboro

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## **Collect**

Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord: Give us grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.

*Revelation 7:9-17, Psalm 34:1-10, 22, 1 John 3:1-3, Matthew 5:1-12*

## **1 All Saints**

Today we celebrate the Feast of All Saints.

The word “saint,” as it is used in the New Testament, is just another word for Christian. Someone who follows Christ. Someone who goes to church.

Culturally, many of us will be more familiar with the idea of a saint as an extraordinary Christian, perhaps one recognized by the Catholic or Episcopal churches. These saints are people who have lived out their faith in a way that we find particularly notable and worthy of emulation. Saints are examples for us as we seek to follow Christ. Saints were not perfect people, but there is some aspect of their lives in which the Holy Spirit was clearly visible, and for that reason we like to remember them.

In our first reading today, the book of Revelation is all about a choice that is being made between Christ and the Roman empire. Christ or empire. By choosing Christ instead of the empire, in defiance of the surrounding culture, the saints found themselves subject to persecution, torture, and death. Yet Scripture confidently asserts that even in the face of apparent defeat, these saints found victory in the all-powerful hand of God. The victory wasn't an imperial kind of victory, of domination and military success and getting your own way. It was a divine victory of faithfulness, a kind of life that cannot be quenched by any merely human opposition.

On All Saints' Day we remember all of those who have gone before us, making the tough choices, choosing an unquenchable life, and finding their reward in God. On All Saints' Day, we join with the saints who have gone before us as together we praise God.

## **2 Baptism**

On All Saints Day we baptize in order to acknowledge that God continues to add to the number of the saints. We continue to choose Christ over empire. We baptize adults like Don who want to confess their faith publicly, and children like Kane, whose parents are determined to raise them in the knowledge of God. We, together with their sponsors, commit ourselves to the sacred responsibility of supporting these new saints in choosing Christ.

And that support will be needed. You can see that as you read in Revelation: the saints are those who have passed through an ordeal and relied on God anyhow. Does that sound like anyone you know? You can see that kind of life described as you listen to today's Gospel: in the Beatitudes, Jesus lists several unfortunate circumstances of life, things we would never choose for ourselves on purpose. Jesus says, "Even if this is your condition today, you are blessed. God is already carrying you to victory."

### 3 Empire vs. Christ

Here's the thing about empire: it's all about strength. It's about avoiding any sign of weakness. It's about winning at any cost. And it's always about getting my own way. To live according to the model of the empire is to be strong at any cost. It is to avoid pain and always look out for number one. This is a culturally appropriate way to live. But in the end, I'm just not that strong. Sometimes I can put on a good show for a little while, but it's not going to last. Eventually you will see the truth of my weakness.

But to choose Christ is to *choose* weakness. It is to choose the cross. It is to open up our hearts and to be vulnerable to other people. That vulnerability is how we love and care for others. That's also how we get hurt sometimes, trampled on and taken advantage of. But by the power of Jesus we are able to do that. Why?

Because Jesus has already won the victory. God has shown us how the game ends. Jesus was perfectly vulnerable, and he was crucified for it. But even then, Jesus was not abandoned by God. Jesus *was* God! Jesus lived again, victorious over the worst humanity could throw at him. The Roman Empire has long since faded out of existence. Other empires continue to spring up in its place. But here *we* are 2000 years later, still telling the story of the crucified one and choosing to follow him. Here we are, 2000 years later, in baptism, choosing to die to our own selves and committing ourselves and our children to Jesus' path instead.

On the cross, God passed judgment over every Empire, every evil, every power that would oppress God's people. In Baptism, we die with Christ and are joined to his victory. We, too, begin to live a resurrected life right in the midst of a world full of hard things.

Even in 2020. Amid a pandemic, social unrest and injustice, and a bitterly contested election: though these things affect us, none of them define us. We take our identity from the waters of baptism, from the oil with which we were marked as Christ's own forever.

In baptism, we make the same choice as the saints of old, and we commit ourselves to making that choice moving forward. In baptism we choose an unquenchable life for ourselves and our children, a life that does not rely on our strength, but God's strength. In baptism we catch a glimpse of the invisible, as the water signifies our surrender to death, and our resurrection with Christ.

**Amen.**