

# ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως: All Saints Sunday B (7 November 2021)

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.

*Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9, Psalm 24, Revelation 21:1-6a, John 11:32-44*

## **1 Death**

The Feast of All Saints is a joyous occasion, and it is made more joyous by the celebration of baptisms as we are doing today! Which makes our readings today all the more jarring for me, with all their talk of death. Our Gospel reading is full of tears and grieving. Jesus weeps and cries aloud at the death of his friend. And when Jesus asks his companions to move away the stone covering the tomb of Lazarus, Martha protests, “there is a stench!”

Our text today is fascinating because we get a little bit of insight into the psychology of God. We get to see Jesus’ emotions come to the surface and find expression. We get to see what Jesus feels as he attends the funeral of his friend. Jesus is sad. Jesus weeps. Jesus is deeply moved in his spirit, in his being. All the skeptical onlookers wonder not at his deep feelings, but at how hollow all his other miracles appear since he sorrows and apparently he couldn’t keep his friend from dying.

It’s a strange passage, isn’t it? You and I know what’s about to happen. Of course no one in the story knew except Jesus: what was going to happen was something new, something unheard-of. And before that new thing happens, Jesus pauses, waits. Instead of rushing forward into a miraculous work of life-giving power, Jesus lingers in the realm of sorrow, mourning, and grief. These feelings are an important part of our lives, even if they are often unwanted guests. Jesus could have applied a technical fix by raising Lazarus from the dead and saying, “why is everyone crying?” But Jesus was not afraid of grief. Jesus was not afraid of sorrow and mourning. Jesus acknowledged and honored and shared these feelings because they are a part of real life. Jesus wept – even though Jesus knew what he was about to do.

## **2 Saints**

Today we celebrate All Saints Day. Even for the saints, the life of faith is challenging. Because it’s still life. It still involves death. There’s still an odor. Saints are people who have a particular perspective on life. They don’t get stuck, swamped, and limited in their own problems and challenges. Instead they keep their eyes on God and God’s kingdom: God’s purposes, God’s movements in the world. This gives them a perspective that is different from other people’s perspectives, a perspective a little more akin to God’s own.

Saints are those who follow Jesus. As we read our Bibles, we note that Jesus went to some pretty dark places and lived an unglamorous, difficult life. As we read today Jesus still sorrowed, still cried, still was deeply moved. It is in those same paths that the Saints have followed, finally ending in victory, but not without spending their time in places of pain and sorrow and mourning. Saints are not other-worldly people, immune to the harsh realities of life. But they do live with perspective.

When I was serving as a chaplain in a hospital, I wondered at what an amazing thing it is that people would walk into that building on their own two feet, and submit to being sedated and cut open. But I suppose the pain of a gall bladder attack, or a shoulder or hip joint that is no longer working, means that these patients had different perspectives on what was happening than I did.

Or consider the perspective that I lacked as a child when receiving injections from my pediatrician. I *hated* that! It was perhaps the scariest thing in my life! (I admit: that's a pretty privileged life!) Yet a life without measles, mumps, or rubella, hepatitis B has been a good thing for me so far. So while I still don't like injections, I get the vaccinations made available to me with a word of thanksgiving. Because I have the perspective to see how beneficial such things have been and continue to be in my life.

### 3 Baptism

Which brings us to baptism.

The practice of Christianity is the practice of growing into the saint-hood that was gifted to us in our baptism. Christianity is not primarily moral training. Christianity is not about the *do's* and *don'ts* and *oughts* and *shoulds*. Christianity is not about regulations or judgment or belonging. Being a saint is primarily about being able to see, to perceive the Kingdom of God, so as to live in it in part even now. Christianity, and the gathering of Christians we call the church, is about learning to see in a saintly way. And all those rules and regulations, practices, and exercises: different ones are helpful guidelines for different ones of us. But their point isn't to make you a good "person." Their point is to teach you and me to shift our perspective in order to see God's world, God's kingdom. That kingdom Jesus said is *near*, even *right here*, if only we would have the eyes to see.

When we learn to see with the perspective of a Saint, it doesn't necessarily make life hurt less. In fact, it may teach us to open up our tender souls and to be willing to suffer a bit more on behalf of others. But the Saints' perspective does give us hope and strength, even through the times when we feel surrounded by the odor of death. Even when we mourn and suffer, we know that Jesus walks alongside us as we tread the same paths he has been down before. And the Gospel gives us the perspective to see that there's something better waiting on the other side of the pain.

This is the gift that we share today with these children among us. We offer up our children in this ritual bath so that the stink of death can be washed off of them, just as it was from each of us. Baptism is a death and resurrection we spend the rest of our lives coming to grips with. There will be tears and grief in these children's lives, and baptism will offer them the perspective of a loving God, a Universe designed for goodness, despite any temporary afflictions. Baptism is the beginning of an intentional journey into the Kingdom of God: a kingdom which surrounds us, if only we have the perspective, the eyes to see. Everybody weeps. Saints are those who also have internalized God's promise that in the end our mourning will be turned to dancing and our sorrow into joy. **Amen.**