

Saint Thomas' Church
 All Saints Day
 November 1, 2019
 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.
 For so persecuted they the prophets
 which were before you.

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
 But for our secular friends it was only
 Halloween

The secular Halloween has become a crude contraction of All Hallows Eve (meaning the day before All Hallows). Anything to avoid its religious meanings.

It is a three day observance:

All Hallows Eve – a time to prepare for All Hallows
 All Saints Day – a time to remember those in Heaven
 All Souls Day (tomorrow) a time to remember all the
 Departed.

Truly, our life in the church is so rich and full

Nov 1st, All Saints Day was first commemorated
 in the 4th Century
 when Pope Gregory IV observed
 that in earlier centuries
 countless men and women
 had been persecuted,
 literally hunted and tortured for their faith in Jesus
 sometimes to the delight of the crowds.

He concluded that we should remember them,

To 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
 devote 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 alter 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 three ways:
 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 television
 serials the Saints were the Superheroes.
 But they were not fiction
 The product of paint, celluloid and imagination
 They were flesh and blood people whose
 heroic actions
 Saved us, motivated us
 and were the examples for our lives.

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 evening.
But their lives and the ways they led them remain
instructive to our lives
and to how we might lead them.

Our remembrance at All Saints also includes
the faithful departed
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.

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

Our ancestors, departed relatives and loved ones.
We remember them this day
And pray for their eternal peace with God.

In olden times this would be the day each year
That we would visit their graves
Decorate them with flowers, poems, mementos
Today and at this service is the day we remember them
Offer thanksgiving for their
Lives
Work and
Examples for our lives.

During the prayer for the whole state of Christ's Church
You may have noticed a pause
As we pray for the faithful departed
Tonight, that pause will be a little longer
Use it to remember the saints in your life.

We also remember saints
that we never met but we know
in history,
in legend
and in writings.

They are all saints too.
People who have separated themselves from the world
For a time
And dedicated themselves to God.

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

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 also 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 Thos,
 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
 He 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.

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 how many people there were
 That boy had listened to every word.
 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.

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 pic nic.

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.

The last verse goes like this:

They lived not only in ages past,
 There are hundreds of thousands still
 The world is bright with the joyous saints
 Who loved to do Jesus’ will
 You can meet them in school, or in lanes, or at sea
 In church in trains or in shops or at tea
 For the saints of God are just folk like me
 And I mean to be one too.

We live in a time that is far different from the violent Christian persecutions of the past. But it is a time that is no less threatening to the church.

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 evening and came to church 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 and Evening Prayer.

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.

To 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 we shouldn't be one too.
Amen.