

All Saints' Day Sermon 2015

Angels, Archangels, Thrones, Dominions, Principalities, Powers, heavenly Virtues, Cherubim and Seraphim; all Saints of God, holy men and women: intercede for us, that we may be worthy to offer (these words in) this Sacrifice to almighty God, to the praise and glory of His name, for our own welfare and also that of all His holy Church. Amen.

A scientist talks to God and says, "God, we can now clone humans, make life, and take care of ourselves. We don't need you anymore." God, believing in free will (after all he created it) says; "ok that's fine. But before I let my beloved children go, I would like to set you one last challenge. If you can complete it, it will prove that you don't need me anymore and that you can look after yourselves no matter what. Each of us has to create our own human using nothing but dirt, and the first one to complete it wins."

The scientist agreed and became very excited at the thought of being able to finally aspire to the heights of God. He sat down and in all haste began making his human. But immediately God stopped him and said, "Whoa there, not so fast. Use your own dirt."

As people of God we claim to believe in a divine being, a God who orders our universe, an all-powerful loving force that keeps us and all things on track. Such an immense being is always going to be beyond our understanding. But our God is not so careless as to reveal to us more than we can bear. For his light would be all too dazzling were we to approach it unprepared. That is of course what life is all about, preparing us to receive the full radiance of God's light and love. In all three of our readings today, we get different insights into what stepping into that glory may feel

like. And it is the strangeness of the situation that will prove our greatest challenge.

In our reading from Revelation this morning, we heard of a new heaven and earth without death or pain or crying or mourning, but where everyone drinks from the water of life.¹ Isaiah 25 uses similar imagery and tells us that this is what awaits us when the veil between us and God is removed.² This is not just heaven, this is M & S Heaven.

Then in our Gospel reading, we get an example of what the result may look like on earth – even the dead are raised.³ This is the power of the glory of God. When we accept God's all-encompassing goodness, even death itself cannot hold us.

As Christians, there are two things that we must always hold on to

- i. First - our God is the ultimate Victor – he brings the victory against evil.
- ii. Second - God, and his Saints, are always active in our world securing that victory.

These, we must never doubt, because to do so is to nail Jesus firmly back to the cross from which he has risen.

No matter how perplexing life may seem at any given moment; no matter how deceptive and enticing the evil around us is, we know that God is enacting his victory against it. God is already bringing all things into the light and justice of his goodness. God has won the victory, through Jesus's cross and resurrection. His cross absorbs all the abuse and violence and

¹ Revelation 21.1-6a

² Isaiah 25.6-9

³ John 11.32-44

hatred and manipulation we can throw at it and his resurrection shows us hope beyond what we deserve.

Through his goodness, God raises up faithful and saintly individuals. Individuals who have lived lives devoted to him, in the service of his church and in the goodness he brings. God's saints are people who have made his goodness manifest in the world. At their deaths God brings all such individuals into his eternal goodness by raising them into what we call heaven. It is this heavenly host, God's warriors in his fight against evil, who we celebrate today.

For today is All Saints' Day, otherwise called All Hallows' Day. The day when all those hallowed under God are especially close to earth to draw us closer to heaven in the process. Indeed, God's eternal Saints are ever active worshipping God in heaven, whilst frustrating the devil's devious demons on earth. Desmond Tutu reminds us that 'if we had the right kind of eyes, we would see the Saints of heaven all around us'.

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There is something about our life's journey that includes developing that right kind of spiritual sight. That is why our regular worship is so important, it helps to focus our vision. As we persevere in faith and help to build up God's church on earth, our spiritual sight awakens and the eternal church of heaven begins to move closer with every prayer and action.

God, with all his Saints, is ever active in our world securing his victory. Despite the frustrations that the world puts in his way, God is bringing all things to completion in his goodness. This is the glory of God. If we can accept that God is in control, then all we can do is follow his lead.

So why do we despair? Why do we doubt? Why do we give up the race? For if God is for us, who may be against us?⁴

God sends people to us for a time to hasten our progress on the journey of faith; sometimes individuals and sometimes groups. Sometimes he sends them for a moment, sometimes a season and sometimes even for a lifetime. Sometimes they are folk just like you and me, but sometimes they are spiritual beings mysteriously making our paths clearer or even carrying us along the way when we are too tired to go on. Whoever he sends, he sends them as his messengers. Is our spiritual sight strong enough to recognise them as such? Do we respond with gratitude or complaint?

God brings us to situations and encounters that offer us an opportunity to deepen our faith in him and build up our Christian character along the way. This stands us in better stead to be numbered among his saints in glory; it gives us a better chance of adapting to the new heaven that he is calling us to, where we will meet him unveiled, face to face - It focuses our spiritual lens.

Are we willing to persevere on the journey even when God's plans for us do not fit with our own designs? Do we see every event as an opportunity to deepen our faith and grow our Christian character?

In all of this, what we do in our worship and in the service of our church, and the way we engage with it, is vitally important if we are to deepen our spiritual sight. This is why the Church is the gateway to the glory of God. Through our actions, prayers and joint focus, we glimpse God's eternal glory. And we view God's glory through the widest lens when we are all united in prayer and endeavour.

⁴ Romans 8:31

Help this Church to be a gateway to the glory of God. There are numerous opportunities for you to grow your Christian character by serving this church, in a whole host of ways, large and small. And you get the satisfaction of knowing that you are also helping others develop their spiritual focus at the same time. Why not let us know what roles you might be interested in? What better way to serve God, his people and begin to develop your spiritual focus for the good of God's church now and into eternity?

May the protection and guidance of the saints be with you and may you be given the spiritual sight to recognise it.

Amen