11.1.2026 The Feast of All Saints

A couple from Minnesota decided to travel to Florida to thaw out during a particularly icy winter, and planned to stay at the same hotel where they spent their honeymoon 20 years earlier. Because of their hectic schedules, it was difficult for the two of them to coordinate their travel plans, so the husband left Minnesota and flew to Florida on Thursday, while his wife planned to fly down the following day. The husband checked into the hotel, and instead of sending a quick text to let his wife know he'd arrived, he decided to send a more thoughtful and loving message by email. However, when he did so, he typed her address in manually, accidentally left out one letter, and sent the message without realizing his mistake.

Meanwhile, somewhere in Houston, a grieving widow was on her way home from her husband's funeral, a man who was a faithful Christian and was called to heaven after a short illness. When the widow arrived at her house, she decided to check her email, expecting to find some condolence messages from family and friends, but after reading the first email that appeared, she screamed and fainted. The widow's son rushed into the room, found his mother lying on the floor, and saw on the computer screen a message that said: To my loving wife: I just arrived today, and I'm sure you're surprised to receive an email from me, but you, my love, were the first person I thought of when I got here, and I wanted send a message to let you know that everything has been carefully prepared for your arrival tomorrow. I'm looking forward to seeing you then, and I pray your journey turns out to be as uneventful as mine.

Part of what makes that story so funny is the fact that we can all relate to the terror this widow felt when she thought her time on this earth was over. Death is our greatest enemy, an enemy we do everything we can to avoid or ignore, but the feast we celebrate this morning, the Feast of All Saints, forces us, for just a moment, to confront the thought of death as we remember and celebrate all the saints who, through physical death, have left this world for the next.

This is a time to celebrate the saints in heaven, those saints who persevered in this life and can say with St. Paul, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith"* (2 Timothy 4:7), and today we bring

to mind not only those saints with names we all know, like saints Peter and Paul, or Andrew and Mary. Today we also remember our loved ones, our parents, grandparents, family, and friends, those beloved saints who have been instrumental in setting our feet on this path that leads to the kingdom of God. As you know, we pray for them every time we celebrate Holy Communion, but today especially, we pray, God that You would "grant them continual growth in thy love and service, and give us grace so to follow their good examples, that with them we may be partakers of thy heavenly kingdom."

In the liturgy for Holy Communion, we not only pray for the saints we love who have "departed this life in thy faith and fear," we pray with them. We pray "with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven." Anglican liturgy is filled with examples that point to our belief in what we call the Communion of Saints. The belief that every saint, throughout all time, here and in heaven, is united to Christ, and to one another through Christ, in His Church, and on this Feast of All Saints there's a particular liturgical example which expresses that belief, and that example is found in the words of the Proper Preface.

So, immediately after we "lift up our hearts" with the *Sursum Corda*, and just before we "laud and magnify" God's glorious name in the *Sanctus*, the Proper Preface articulates our belief in, and our thanksgiving for the communion of saints, as we pray, saying, God, "Who, in the multitude of thy Saints, hast compassed us about with so great a cloud of witnesses that we, rejoicing in their fellowship, may run with patience the race that is set before us, and, together with them, may receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away." These words reveal the intimacy, and the reality of the fellowship, the communion that we, as saints on earth, share with the saints in heaven, and as I'm sure you noticed, this preface echoes the inspired words in which the writer to the Hebrews states, *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us"* (Hebrews 12:1).

Consider the unseen, yet ever near reality, that a great cloud of witnesses, the company of heaven, the people of God who have gone before us, currently surround us. They are cheering us on, encouraging us to run this Christian

race with the same kind of holy, righteous endurance that they did, and the fact that we can't currently see them makes their loving presence no less real. We might compare this great, unseen cloud of witnesses to the innumerable amount of stars that fill the sky every night. Just because we can't see the stars now that it's day doesn't mean they're gone. They're still right there, only temporarily are they hidden from our sight. We all know with complete certainty that when the sun sets we will see the stars again, and we know with an even greater certainty, that when the sun sets on our life on this earth, we will see those saints we love again.

In his Second Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul encouraged Christians with these words, he wrote, *"… do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, yet our inner self is being renewed day by day… So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal"* (2 Corinthians 4:16, 18). On All Saints' Day, we acknowledge and celebrate not only what we can see, our brothers and sisters in Christ who run the race with us here on this earth, but also, all that we can't see, our family and friends who have gone before us, the saints in heaven who love us, the *"great cloud of witnesses"* that surround us and cheer us on, whose desire is that we persevere, that we *"run with endurance the race that is set before us."*

In this life it isn't easy to fix our eyes on the unseen, but having an eternal perspective in this temporary life is the only way to see and experience the things that do not fade away, but actually last - forever. I was reminded of that fact just a few weeks ago as I sat next to a dear old friend of mine. She was lying in a hospital bed, I was praying and reading Scripture aloud to her, and midway through the fifteenth chapter of St. John she *"finished the race,"* and though I was able to see her close her eyes here, I couldn't see her as she opened them in heaven.

Is she dead, or is she more alive than she's ever been? Is she gone forever, or like the stars is she only temporarily hidden from my sight? Death is our greatest enemy, an enemy we do everything we can to avoid or ignore, but on All Saints' Day we confront the thought of death with the historical truth of an empty tomb, the Risen Christ, and the blessed assurance that every saint, throughout all time, here and in heaven, is united to Christ, and to one another through Christ, in His Church. "*We are surrounded by so great a*

cloud of witnesses." By the grace of God, may we *"lay aside every weight," "press on toward the goal…"* (Philippians 3:14), and *"run with endurance the race that is set before us."*