

## All Saints Observed / November 3, 2019

### 1 John 3:1

**“See what love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God.”**

All Saints, which falls on November 1st, provides an opportunity for believers on earth to consider the church in heaven, heaven itself and the day in which the church in heaven and the church on earth will become one in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The early church began to commemorate the faith of special leaders by having a worship service on the day of their death, which was considered the day they were born into eternal life. These special days were meant to give believers encouragement, as they remembered the faith and faithfulness of those who had gone before them. As is written in the letter to the Hebrews, “Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.” These special days for special saints encourage us in faith, by showing us the effect of God’s grace in their lives and assuring us that His grace in Christ will also be sufficient in our lives!

As a compliment to the days set aside to remember certain individual believers who had passed out of this life and into heaven’s peace, All Saints Day serves as a reminder that all who live and die in Christ are saints. Saints are sinners made holy by the blood of Christ that washes away our sins. All Saints is more than a time to remember the dead, it is a time to remember that in Christ all believers have died spiritually to the control of sin, the power of the devil and the condemnation of eternal death. In the letter to the Romans St. Paul wrote, “Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead, we too might walk in newness of life.”

All Saints is a day to remember our baptism and how in Holy Baptism we have already died to sin with Christ and been raised to a new life through the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. In Baptism the Holy Spirit joins us to the body of Christ in time and for eternity. Regardless of whether we are alive in the body or not, we are always alive in Christ and alive to one another in the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit binds the church in heaven and the church on earth to Christ. Whether we live in the body or our bodies rest in the earth, all saints are part of the living body of Christ through baptism into the one Spirit. St. Paul comforts us in our fear of death and in our grief for those who have died in Christ saying, “Whether we live or whether we die, we belong to the Lord.” All Saints belong to the Lord. The Holy Spirit dwells within the saints on earth and among the saints in heaven. One day the Holy Spirit will complete the promise of our baptism, by giving all believers a share in Christ’s resurrection. St. Paul concludes his remarks about the power and promise of baptism in the letter to the Romans saying, “If we have been united with Him in a death like His, we will certainly also be united with Him in a resurrection like His.” All Saints leads us to the promise of our baptism in Christ and points us to its fulfillment in the resurrection to a new and eternal life.

In our text St. John celebrates the special relationship believers have with God through faith in Jesus Christ. He says, “See what love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God.” There is no relationship deeper and more enduring than the relationship between children and parents. Children are the fruit of the union of husband and wife that God sanctified at creation. God blessed the union of man and woman in marriage saying, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and shall hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Human children are conceived in God’s love and born out of the union of father and mother. Parents naturally hold their children in high regard! People naturally favour their

children over other people's children. What we like in other people's children, we love in our own children. What we dislike in other people's children, we tolerate, overlook and forgive in our own children; even more so with our grandchildren.

Children of God are conceived in the love of God in Christ Jesus and born of the Holy Spirit in the water of baptism. In the prologue to his gospel St. John says God makes us His children through Jesus. He says of Jesus, "He was in the world and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to His own and His own did not receive Him, but to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." God gives us birth as His children! In the same spirit St. Paul says in the letter to the Galatians saying, "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In Christ, we become children of God and are made part of His family. St. John celebrates our relationship with God saying in the words of the NIV translation, "See what great love the Father has lavished upon us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"

God is the Father of all people by virtue of creation. From one man and one woman, God created all the peoples that inhabit the earth. God created all people 'good,' but with the sin of the first people, human beings lost the goodness of creation. Since the sin of the first humans, all people are conceived and born into a broken relationship with God; in which our spirit and will are rebellious to His Spirit and opposed to His will. Nevertheless, despite human sin and our rebellion against His will, God continues to love all people. He shows His continuing kindness through the preservation of the earth and the cycle of the seasons. As he evangelized the pagan worshippers in the Greek cities of Lystra and Derbe, St. Paul said, "In past generations He allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet He did not leave Himself without witness, for He did you good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."

God continued to love the world after the sin of the first people and promised a Saviour through the offspring of the woman. He created Israel as a nation to make His name and the promise of a Saviour known. God gave the greatest demonstration of His kindness and showed the unique nature of His love, by giving Jesus to die for the sins of the whole world. St. Paul wrote, "God demonstrates His own love for us in this: that while we were sinners Christ died for us." God reaches out to all people through the gospel, so people would become His children in the fullest sense, by receiving in their hearts Jesus as Saviour. His sacrifice covers the sins of all believers and paid the debt for the sins of all people. All we need is to believe in Jesus as our Saviour and receive Him into our hearts through baptism into His death and resurrection. In his first letter St. John said, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world." Jesus is the Saviour. We become saints through faith in Him.

Writing to his disciple Timothy, St. Paul said Jesus is "the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe." Jesus is the saviour of all people, because He offered Himself for the sin of the world. Jesus is the saviour especially of those who believe, because those who believe receive the benefits of His sacrifice in the forgiveness of their sins, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the promise of resurrection to eternal life. Those who believe in Jesus become God's children in the fullest sense, in love and forgiveness. Because Jesus is the saviour of those who believe, God has a special love for those who are reborn as His children through the word and the washing of Holy Baptism. There is no greater good than becoming a child of God through

faith in Jesus. Even as God seeks the good of all people, He seeks the greatest good for those who have received adoption as His daughters and sons through faith and baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection! If God loved us so much when we were sinners that He gave His Son for us, consider how much more fully He will lavish His love upon us now that we have received adoption and become His children through faith in Jesus' Name!

St. John writes, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him." All Saints reminds us of what the church in heaven and the church on earth have in common; Jesus the Saviour and the Holy Spirit who joins us to Him in faith and binds us together in His body. All Saints also highlights the difference between the church in heaven and the church on earth; specifically what the church in heaven no longer has, but we continue to have even as believers. That thing is sin. The church in heaven and the church on earth are holy for the sake of Jesus, because of His blood and righteousness. The church in heaven is different from the church on earth, in that the saints in heaven have been fully cleansed and forever set free from the stain and burden of sin. The saints in heaven have no sin! It has been washed away in the blood of the Lamb! In his vision of heaven, St. John saw people from every nation under heaven standing in the presence of God, wearing robes made white by the blood of the Lamb. He was told, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they stand before the throne of God." They no longer suffer grief, they no longer struggle with doubt, no more are they tempted by despair or any weakness of the flesh. Faith has passed into sight and they rejoice in the presence of the Father in heaven. The saints in heaven stand in contrast to us. We live by faith, still burdened by sin. For them, faith has passed into sight! They have been set free from the burden of sin and the sorrow of its effects. God has wiped every tear from their eyes.

One day God will wipe the tears from our eyes. A day will come when He will call us from this life to enter His presence and join the church in heaven. From this side of heaven we may view that day with mixed emotions, even fear and dread, but it will be a glorious day! However, an even greater day is yet to come! The day of our death will bring tears and sadness to those we leave behind. But the day Christ returns, all sadness will forever pass away. There will be no one left behind to mourn. The church in heaven and the church on earth will become one in the resurrection of Christ. And so St. John says, "When He appears we shall be like Him." We shall be like Him in perfect holiness and be with Him and all saints in perfect blessedness. This is the goal of our faith! This is what we think of when we remember the saints who have passed out of our lives. As children of God, this is what we anticipate and celebrate at All Saints. God in His grace keep us to that day and in His mercy bring us to that dear land of rest. In Jesus' Name. Amen