

## For All the Saints

I treasure the days when the church calendar makes us stop and think about what our faith means. Easter is surely the most significant one. The Day of Resurrection was the first to be celebrated in the early church. Christmas is another with all of its family associations. That's why some people come to church only on Christmas and Easter. I have to add All Saints Day as another special one. It's unique in being the only major feast that can be celebrated on the following Sunday. This year we get to celebrate it on the day itself.

All Saints Day connects us with our ancestors in the faith, known and unknown. The cover of Sunday's bulletin lists those whom we remember – parents, grandparents, children, others. All are now in the blessed life of Jesus Christ. Standing in Trinity Cathedral on All Saints Day I am aware of all the generations that have worshipped there: people whom I remember from the nearly forty years since I first walked through the door; stories they've told me about their parents and grandparents; those whose names are on plaques and stained glass windows. For over 150 years the cathedral has welcomed a BIG communion of saints!

That's why today's passage from the Revelation to John speaks so strongly to me. It has so many resonances, just like the many associations within a church long-attended. I hear the last chorus of Handel's *Messiah*. I think of all the funerals for which families chose this passage. In a book of the Bible otherwise filled with judgment, here are verses of great hope.

John was trying to describe something indescribable, being in the presence of the living God. He projected into the future what has already begun, the new creation inaugurated by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Today we need that hope, during this pandemic, two days before Election Day. Surrounded by the community of saints, we can almost see the bright and glorious presence of God that now surrounds them.

Right before this passage John spoke of 144,000 people, twelve thousand chosen from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. Here the number of the redeemed is expanded to a great multitude from absolutely everywhere. I take great heart in that. God does give every human being the freedom to walk away from his presence, permanently, though why anyone would choose that is beyond me. John shows how many do choose God's presence and accept his love. No wonder Handel used their joyful words of worship in his oratorio about the Messiah!

We have a foretaste of that heavenly worship every week at Trinity. We who gather in person worship God on behalf of those who choose not to come out of a sense of precaution. After all, that is what we are made for, to love and worship God. John's vision tells us that someday we will be able to do that forever in the company of all the saints. I'm reminded of Teresa of Avila, who when she was a child and studying the saints' lives, would repeat over and over to herself "For ever, for ever, for ever, for ever, they shall see God."

John promises even more than the vision and worship of God. He promises God's shelter. "They will hunger no more, and thirst no more;" he writes, "the sun will not strike them, not any scorching heat" – nor any virus, we might say! "The Lamb... will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." That last always brings tears to *my* eyes. To live in a time when crying will cease, when sorrow will be no more. That will be heaven indeed.

On this All Saints Day we are given that promise of a future which awaits us. Like those whom we love, who have gone before us, we will all rest in the everlasting arms of God. Today, in the midst of anxiety, loss, and fear, those saints surrounding us remind us that this is not all that there is. In spite of all appearances to the contrary, the new creation of Jesus Christ has begun. We are God's children *now*, even though what we will be has not yet been revealed. Grieve for those whom you have lost, and rejoice that you and they have your names written in heaven. Surely Jesus is coming soon. Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.

[All Saints Day: Revelation 7:9-17; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12.]