

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

“The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,  
and no torment will ever touch them.

In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died,  
and their departure was thought to be a disaster,  
and their going from us to be their destruction;  
but they are at peace.”

Today we are celebrating the feast of All Saints,  
a day when we celebrate the tradition of saints throughout history.

For the early church, saint was simply a term for a believer.

As the church grew, and its bureaucracy grew,  
saint began to be used to define a certain level of belief,  
and so became an honorific title, something one had to earn.

In the Roman Catholic church

there is a whole series of steps that must be followed  
before one becomes an official saint.

It is a little easier in the Episcopal Church

to make it into Lesser Feasts and Fasts,  
the official book of people whose contributions to the life of the church  
is enough to have a day set apart for them.

Reading through that book is an interesting adventure,

as you encounter saints as diverse as

Gregory of Nazianzus, Frances Perkins, Julian of Norwich,  
Athanasius, Augustine of Canterbury, Jackson Kemper,  
Thurgood Marshall, and Bede the Venerable,  
all in the month of May alone.

Still, in the Episcopal church

we have returned to the usage of the early church,  
using saint as a way to recognize the belief in all of us.

We are all the Saints, and yet today is not about us really,  
it is about the historical line that we find ourselves in the midst of.

The saints who have gone before,  
the saints around us now,  
and the saints yet to come.

The communion of saints.

Today we will be remembering the saints of our community  
who even though they have died,  
have still had an impact on our lives;  
“all the saints, who from their labors rest.”

The church is responsible for maintaining this line.

Growing up new saints, maintaining the continuity of the line,  
feeding and teaching them in the faith during their life,  
and remembering them when they move beyond this mortal coil.

So why do we do this?

What is so compelling about this vision of the communion of saints?

It goes way beyond the simple maintenance of an institution.

In the Wisdom of Solomon, the author speaks to us  
of the stark difference between this world and the next.

The Jerusalem of this world and the New Jerusalem of the time to come.

They are words of hope that diminish the struggles of today  
by giving us a longer vision.

They are words of hope beyond hope.

They are words that anchor the remembrances of the past  
against the struggles of the present  
to give us hope for the future.

Sadly, there are those who would see heaven as a small place,

with limited space only for those whom they would deem worthy.

In our alternate reading for today,

Isaiah gives us an image of the afterlife as a great feast.

His words are some of the most famous ones in the Bible.

“On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples  
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,  
of rich food filled with marrow,  
of well-aged wines strained clear...”

Isaiah reminds us that the Lord of hosts is making a feast for all peoples,  
that the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces,  
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth.

Heaven is most definitely not a small place.

The communion of saints surrounds us as a constant reminder  
that salvation isn't personal, it's communal.

It is not for me or you alone,

or only for those who think like us, or look like us, or act like us.

It is for the whole communion, the whole community.

For all the saints.

This is the Lord we worship and for whom we wait to return.

This is the Lord that loves us all, and would save us all.

Don't settle for anything less.

Amen.