Readings for the Feast of All Saints

1st November 2026

First Reading: Revelation 7:9-17

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!' And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, singing, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen.'

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?' I said to him, 'Sir, you are the one that knows.' Then he said to me, 'These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'

Second Reading: 1 John 3:1-3

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Gospel: St Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.'

A Reflection for the Feast of All Saints

from Rev'd Anne Macdonald

As you probably know, throughout the year many parts of the worldwide church observe festivals both old and new, just as we do this Sunday on 'All Saints Day'. These feast days give us an opportunity to focus on, and celebrate, a particular aspect of our faith. The oldest festival, and the most important, is Easter. The earliest recorded celebration of Easter occurred in the second century AD, although we think it was celebrated well before then. The newest festival is Christ the King, which was established in the twentieth century, and which we will celebrate at the end of the month. All Saints Day dates back to the fourth century when it was established as a day to remember martyrs. By the seventh century it had expanded to include all saints, known and unknown. So, All Saints is one of the oldest festivals of the church and was still kept by many protestant churches after the reformation. The Scottish Episcopal church considers All Saints Day to be one of the more important festivals in the church calendar and asks us to continue to observe it.

The All Saints Festival traditionally started the day before on All Hallows Eve and was composed of: All Hallows, All Saints and All Souls, with each day focusing slightly differently on those gone before us. All Hallows Eve was a day of preparation for the coming two days and also a day of fun. A day on which poorer members of the community were allowed to ask the wealthier members for charity. All Saints was a day of remembrance and prayer for all the saints, named and unnamed, gone before us, and All Souls allowed people to pray for family and friends. It sounds sombre, but it also gave people hope for themselves and their loved ones, as they recalled Christ's promise of a future after death.

Nowadays, for many in our communities, the fun element of All Hallows has been transferred into the secular festival of Halloween, with its pumpkins and ghouls and trick or treating, and the spiritual aspect has been set aside. Frequently, people who celebrate Halloween assume that it came from an ancient pagan festival and do not realise that it arose out of a Christian celebration.

In the UK, if we observe All Saints and All Souls, we tend to think of them as separate events: All Saints Day as a celebration of the saints, and All Souls as the point at which we reflect on the lives of, or pray for, loved ones who have died before us. In some places in the world though, people still observe these three days as a single festival of remembrance and celebration. One of these places is New Orleans, where All Saints is a time to visit family graves, clean the graves and surrounding area, hold family gatherings and meals. Of course, New Orleans also is a great centre of jazz, and funerals in New Orleans are frequently accompanied by that great hymn, made famous by Louis Armstrong, 'O when the saints go marching in'.

This hymn contains a lot of imagery from Revelation, and one of the readings for this Sunday is from Revelation. A passage which talks about all who have travelled towards Christ and stand before him at the end of time. A mix of ordinary people from all of humanity, all of whom have had different life experiences. In the last verse we are told how the Lamb, Christ, is their shepherd and how Christ will guide them to the springs of the water of life.

The second reading set for this Sunday, from the first letter of John, discusses a similar idea. In this text the writer talks of Christians being the children of God and goes on to say that in the future the children of God will see him, meaning Christ, and recognise him as he is. As a result of recognising Christ when he is revealed, which is still to come, all will be drawn to him. So, these two readings both talk about those who have gone before us and lived well in Christ, but also offer all of us, living and departed, hope. A hope which is based on the presence of Christ now and in the future.

How does this Sunday's Gospel, the Beatitudes, relate to All Saints day and to the other two readings? We are used to thinking of the Beatitudes as giving hope to all who suffer. That is undoubtedly true, but the Beatitudes also outline many of the qualities Christ asked us to prioritise to live a good life. The Beatitudes ask us to show mercy, be peacemakers, to be pure in heart. They also talk about righteousness, which when used in scripture relates to behaving well, looking towards God, and receiving God's grace. The reading from Revelation talked about the Good Shepherd guiding us. Here we have guidance. Last week Clare spoke to us about the two greatest commandments: to love the Lord your God and to love your neighbour as yourself; to live a life which is built upon following the two great commandments. The Beatitudes identify all of us who suffer, our neighbours and ourselves, and also talk about being in a right relationship with God. Christ gave us hope through his resurrection. He also gave us his teachings, which show us how to come closer to God, but teachings such as the Beatitudes, also show us God's mercy. He knows we cannot be perfect.

The readings we have just examined do not mention the word 'Saints', so why are we using it here? The most straightforward answer is because Paul did. In his letters, Paul used the word 'Saints' to refer to the community of all, both living and departed, who turned to Christ. Who are these Saints? Well of course there are the named people: the Apostles; the martyrs; the evangelists; those who have given their life to help other people and show them the love of Christ. Devout people who have lived before us. But the saints are also unknown people who have touched the lives of others. When I was a child the wife of our priest was someone who quietly helped people around her, regardless of who they were. I overheard two ladies talking about her one day, they thought I was asleep, long story. The elderly father of one of them was seriously ill at home, and her equally elderly mother was struggling. Mrs Bovey prepared food for these people, who lived down the road, whom she barely knew, not once but several times. Visited them and did what she could to help them. The two ladies where amazed by her generosity, and that she would help relative strangers in this way. They saw the light of Christ reflected in her. There are unlimited examples like this, of people living as Christ asked us to, without any expectation of recognition, or sometimes even thanks. We can probably all think of someone like this, who quietly follows the teachings laid out in the Beatitudes and in the discussion about the two great commandments.

However, there is even more to the celebration of All Saints. We talk about the Communion of Saints; the connection across time and space of all who follow Christ. A communion we are all part of. Perhaps this is why the people of New Orleans use the hymn 'O when the saints go marching in' at funerals, because it continues 'Lord I want to be in that number', and reminds us that the Communion of Saints cuts across class, and race and who you are, and what you do, and expresses hope in the future, a future Christ calls all of us to.