
Introduction to All Saints Day

Am I alone in disliking much that is associated with Hallowe'en? – in normal years, a trend towards more aggressive “trick and treat”, vampire and witches outfits in every store, fireworks that petrify pets. & this year with more time on people's hands, houses & gardens be-decked with skeletons and cobwebs. The word Hallowe'en comes from All Hallows' (All Saints') Eve. Present Hallowe'en activities originate in the Celtic New Year celebration of *Samhain*, a time when it was thought the dead revisited the earth and when people wondered what the New Year held in store. So meals were left out for the dead, fires were lit and loud noises made to frighten away evil spirits.

The Christian Church provided an alternative festival. Instead of fearing evil and worrying about the future, All Saints (today 1st November) provides a time when the achievements of the saints are remembered and the ultimate triumph of good reasserted.

When the days are getting shorter and hours of darkness longer, and even in normal years, many of us suffer a darker mood (S.A.D. – seasonally affective disorder), Christians know that “*The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness can never overcome it*”; that Jesus spoke of himself as the “*Light of the World*” and promised that whoever follows Him *will never walk in darkness*; and that for all those “*in Christ*”, the ultimate power of evil over us has been defeated.

More than that, it is not just some very special godly canonised people who are “saints” but **all** Christian believers, who are called “saints” in the writings of St. Paul and St. John and in the Psalms in the Bible. We are all invited / called to be “**saints**”, a word that means “set apart” – set apart for Christ's service, set apart to make a difference in the world, welcomed and adopted as sons and daughters of Almighty God, and “blameless” – not without fault but treated just as if we are not guilty – through trusting in God's love for us in Christ.

Today, with all the saints through history, let's walk in the light and celebrate.

Reflection 1: Living in the Light of God's love

Today, let's not focus on the darkness that lay behind the original pagan appeasement of evil forces and departed souls but in the Light that Jesus came to share and the light of Jesus..

John, the youngest – & probably the longest living of the 12 apostles, someone very conscious that he was loved by Jesus, had first-hand knowledge of the man, Jesus Christ. He knew Jesus was real, flesh and blood with a birth date and DNA and fingerprints. The first disciples knew Him as a human being just like us but also that this man was also the light of the world bringing us knowledge that God is light. Those of us who believe do not just subscribe to a philosophy, or even a religion. We put our faith in a person, someone who was a human being – and yet was and is God.

And yet as John points out, we do sin, mess up and spoil our lives.

I remember a church elder once urging me, "*Iain, never say sorry. Don't show weakness and don't let on if you've got it wrong.*" He had the best of intentions but that was terrible advice. Out of habit and shame, we each want to try to hide our sin & our faults, from others, even those closest to us, even from ourselves. It takes courage & humility to face up to ourselves & acknowledge the truth: *I have sinned*. It's a confession of failure, of dependence. It goes against the grain and against a culture that claims to celebrate personal independence – my rights, my freedoms, my own choice to do what I want and please myself. So we mess up and carry the burden. But, wrote John, if we do face God & confess to Him our sin, we know the joy & peace of being forgiven. I'm not talking about confessing to a priest and asking him to ask God for forgiveness but about me or you and God, being honest and real with the God who knows us and with Whom there is no point pretending anyway; saying sorry to God and asking His forgiveness through Jesus -. Jesus who went to the cross to make that possible - and being assured of that forgiveness and His love.

But being truly sorry requires us wanting to & doing what we can to make amends and may require us to say sorry to those we have wronged.

And John goes on to point out, the consequences of this step of humility are significant and life changing. We have relationship with each other (7). Fellowship is not just a friendly relationship over mugs of tea or coffee – it means sharing. We can open up & share personal difficulties and struggles and joys. For we share a common life in Christ. We are made clean, made right with God. We are purified in that we are no longer contaminated by sin that gets in the way. We are no longer alone.

Because it's not about any one of us having now got everything right or being perfect **but about Jesus and God's love for us. John 3:16ff. *God so loved ...the world... that He sent part of Himself, Jesus, that whoever believes in Him shall have eternal life....***His name, *Jesus or Saviour* means someone who sets us free, who allows us to make a fresh start.

The most common mobile text message sent on 9/11 from those trapped in the hijacked planes or in the Twin Towers to family and friends helpless outside were just 3 words – *I love u!* .

That is why Jesus came; that is what the church should be about. *God says, "I know you don't deserve it but I love you.*

So we have a choice. **John 3:19 –**

Let us choose to live in the light – the light of God's love for us in Christ.

Reflection 2: Not being weary in doing good

A further period of restrictions lies ahead of us. We are now more weary and drained than back before Easter. The Lord does not ignore our changing circumstances. ***Not being weary in doing good*** may be the message we need to hear.

After most of the letter reminding us that we cannot depend on doing all we should do to please God but rather on God's grace offered to us through Jesus, Paul ends by telling us how we are to live: we are to walk in step with the Spirit and to let God's Spirit also into our relations with others.

In 2020, we live individualistic, isolated, rather self-centred lives, especially in this time of pandemic but for Paul, Christianity is a family affair, and part of what it means to be a Christian is to care for the practical needs of others. Paul uses the image of sowing and reaping, the principle is that one way or another, we always see the return. Paul is not saying that God is trying to catch anyone out, it is just how the Lord has set up the universe; there is no way round it. If I keep driving my car whilst ignoring the engine light warning, eventually, it will have expensive consequences. If I take it to the garage early even though it costs me now, ultimately, I'll see the benefit of doing that. & Paul applies that to doing good. What we do for one another is not a wasted effort; in fact, it is a spiritual investment for the future.

But the idea of "*doing good to all people*" may be overwhelming so he gives us a short hand guide – *as we have opportunity*. So picture concentric circles around us, brothers and sisters in Christ in the local church; our family, long-time friends, our neighbours, people we may work alongside. The Lord has placed these people. But Paul adds a phrase to help – "***if we do not give up!***"

Paul was very aware that we may find it wearying to do this. There is need everywhere. 500 years ago, in Geneva, Jean Calvin observed the vast numbers of the needy may overwhelm us; and the warmth of our initial enthusiasm is damped by the cold of others. One of the hardest things to do is to look out for the needs of others when our own capacity is already low; but even just to say to someone or phone and ask, "How are you?" can make a difference. You may not see the returns just now but one day in eternity, we will see the harvest.

Gracious Father, our refuge in times of trouble, help us to see those whom You have placed around us; strengthen us when we are weary of doing good. Amen.