

Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit
Service at Home : 3rd November 2024
All Saints and All Souls Prepared by Pat Fry

Introduction

You will be reading this on 3rd November, but I am writing it a couple of weeks earlier. The shops are full of Hallowe'en stuff; pumpkins, pointed hats, ugly masks. By the time you read this Strictly Come Dancing will have celebrated Hallowe'en with outlandish fancy dress. It seems Hallowe'en has become the major late Autumn event - when I was a child it was Firework Night we all looked forward to with great excitement, and Hallowe'e'n passed us by unnoticed.

Much of what now happens at Hallowe'en developed from some of the traditions of the Celtic festival of Samhain, the half way point between the Autumn Equinox and the Winter Solstice.

People then thought that, just as we need sleep to regain our energy, the sun also needed to sleep through the winter to be ready to wake up in the Spring; similarly the land needed time to recover after Harvest, and so they'd have a party to say Thank You, Goodnight, Sleep Well.

It was also a time when reflecting on the cycle of life and death, people both recalled their ancestors, and feared that malevolent spirits might roam the earth, and must be driven away by light and fire.

Very wisely the early Christian missionaries did not try to stamp out the old traditions, but added a Christian meaning: on the two days after the old festival, Christians would remember people who had demonstrated the light of Christ in the way they had lived, showing the love of God that casts out fear: All Saints - the well-known, All Souls -humble faithful Christian people known personally.

A thought to ponder

Fill your minds with things that are good,

true, pure, right and lovely. Don't dwell on what is ugly or evil, but reflect on what is truly beautiful and good. Phillipians 4:8

Prayer of approach

Gracious God,
help me now to focus my thoughts,
to put aside my worries and troubles for a short time, and make space to sense your presence where I am.
with many people throughout the world and through all time. Amen.

I've chosen a very old, much loved hymn appropriate to the season:

Hymn 69: Ye holy angels bright

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAwTDwbVM3o>

Ye holy angels bright
who wait at God's right hand
or through the realms of light
fly at your Lord's command.
Assist our song,
or else the theme
too high doth seem
for mortal tongue

Ye blessed souls at rest,
who ran this earthly race,
and now from sin released
behold the Saviour's face,
his praises sound
as in his sight
with sweet delight
ye do abound.

Ye saints who toil below,
adore your heavenly King ,
and onward as ye go
some joyful anthem sing:
take what he gives,
and praise him still
through good or ill
who ever lives.

My soul, bear thou thy part ,
triumph in God above,
and with a well-tuned heart
sing thou the songs of love.

Let all thy days
till life shall end,
whate'er he send
be filled with praise.
Richard Baxter 1615-1691. et al.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

O Lord our God, thank you for the many
people throughout the ages who have
followed your way of life joyfully.

O Lord our God, thank you for all who have
chosen the way of Jesus.
In the midst of trial they held out hope,
In the midst of hatred they kindled love,
In the midst of persecution they witnessed to
your power
In the midst of despair they clung to your
promise.
Thank you for the inspiration they give .

O Lord our God, we thank you for the truth
they passed on to us:
It is by giving that we shall receive,
It is by becoming weak that we shall be
strong,
It is by loving others that we shall be loved,
It is as we offer ourselves that your kingdom
will unfold
Thank you for the truth of your promises.
May we hold them dear. Amen
(adapted from Christian Council of the Philippines,
c. Christian Aid

A personal thanksgiving

Beloved God, holder of our precious
memories,
Bless to us our remembrance of those who
sustained and inspired our faith in years gone
by,
those who we see no more but rest with You
now.
Thank you for their inspiration and their love,
which lives on to this day,
and illuminates our pathway with their love
of us and you. Amen Lisa Ball

Readings: Matthew 5:3-12

2 Corinthians 4: 5-7

Prayer of confession:

Loving God, these two readings give us so
much to think about.
Whenever we read this Gospel picture of the
characteristics of those who are truly blessed,
we are humbled.
This teaching is so awesome –
so far above our struggles to walk in your
way, and we recognise how far short we fall.
And so we ask your forgiveness.

For all our shortcomings you have entrusted
us to join the great company of those who
show your light in the world.

Here we are ordinary people- like the clay
pots in the reading.
Sometimes we do let your love shine out, but
often that light is buried underneath our
selfishness, our thoughtlessness, or sheer
tiredness. Forgive us if we have been
preoccupied with less important things.
Forgive us if we have ignored your call.

In quiet let us think back over the past week.
Let us thank God for the times we have felt
close to Him, and ask forgiveness for the
times we have crowded him out.

Hear the words of Jesus for each of us, as we
are truly sorry.
Go in peace your sins are forgiven.
Now, follow me. Amen

Reflection: All Saints

The word "saints" means different things to
different people. Most people would
probably think of a few famous names: St.
Francis , St Peter, St. Christopher.
When I first moved to Southampton I
discovered from my class of juniors it meant
the football team they supported –
Southampton Football Club had begun life as
the football team from St Mary's Church.

To Roman Catholics "Saints "refers only to
those recognised as such by their church, and
in whose name miracles have been
performed.

The Apostles creed talks about the communion of saints by which it means all the faithful who have gone before.

On an RE teachers course in Birmingham I visited a Serbian Orthodox Church. We attended the first part of morning service—the Serbian Orthodox regard the sacrament of Communion as so special that only members of their own faith community may be present for the most sacred part. There are no windows to look out of, but the walls of the main body of the church are covered in pictures of the saints. There's a text in Hebrews about "being surrounded by a cloud of witnesses" – in Serbian Orthodox worship the pictures remind the worshippers that they are worshipping together with those who have gone before and are now in heaven, Indeed the whole service is seen as a glimpse of heaven.

But in the non-conformist churches, the word saint is often used as Paul used it at the beginning of some of his letters – "to the saints in Ephesus, to the saints in Colossae, to the saints in Philippi, to the church of God in Corinth, including all the saints throughout Achaia." He doesn't mean the selected most holy few – but simply all the Christians there.

But it's not quite that simple. The Greek word Paul used, which is the equivalent of a Hebrew word in the Old Testament means "holy ones" or "the faithful". The Authorised version uses the word saints in the Old Testament – but more modern translations translate the same word as "holy ones." So as Christians we are all called to live in obedience to the teachings of Jesus – and thus to start to become "holy ones" who show the light of Christ through their living.

The Beatitudes that you have just read, give a wonderful summary of what it means to live in the way of Jesus, words we aspire to follow – but wow – haven't we got a long way to go?

That all sounds a bit beyond us, but the list of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5, puts it in

words I find easier to get my head around, though still very hard to live up to: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

There's another big problem with the word Saint. A lot of people use it in negative way – meaning someone who thinks they are better than other people, or "too heavenly minded to be any earthly use".

They see people who go to church as people who think they are "good". Whenever a member of clergy hits the headlines for child abuse, sexual licence, drug abuse, or making a mess of things in some other way you hear people saying – Hypocrites the lot of them – think they are better than us, try tell us what to do – but they are a bad lot.

At a more mundane level – "Mrs A went to chapel all her life, but when her husband died, who helped her, not Mrs B who was too busy with chapel committees, but her husband's old friends from down the pub."

We know this is a terrible misunderstanding of what it means to be a Christian – but it is persistent, and it is very hard to convince people they've got it so wrong.

Our reading from 2 Corinthians reminds us what we know all too well – we are entrusted with the treasure of God's love – but we are like ordinary everyday containers, that crack and crumble and chip easily- not ornate gold jewellery boxes, or secure safes where you might expect such treasure to be kept safe, set apart.

We know only too well our weaknesses, our failures, our need of God's forgiveness and grace, as we seek to learn to walk more closely in his way.

So far I haven't mentioned Methodist teaching — the idea that starting from wherever we are, however much we get things wrong, living the Christian life is about

gradually being transformed till one day we may truly reflect the light of Christ's love.

It has been said – and I can't find the source of this quotation: "The church is a collection of sinners slowly being transformed into a community of saints, by the grace of God".

Hymn746 For all the saints who've known your love

[For All The Saints Who Showed Your Love \(John Pipet\) \[StF 746\]](#)

For all the saints who've shown your love
In how they live and where they move,
for mindful women, caring men,
accept our gratitude again.

For all the saints who've loved your name,
whose faith increased the Saviour's fame,
who sang your songs and shared your word,
accept our gratitude good Lord.

For all the saints who named your will,
and showed the kingdom coming still
through selfless protest, prayer and praise,
accept the gratitude we raise.

Bless all whose will or name or love,
reflects the grace of heaven above.
though unacclaimed by earthly powers,
Your life through theirs has hallowed ours.

John Bell b1949 and Graham Maule b.1958

Prayer for others and ourselves

Take time to give thanks for people you have known who have shown you something of the love and truth of Jesus.

Take time to pray for people you are particularly concerned for, or for a current issue that is on your mind.

Now a prayer, picking up on the seasonal theme of a proper place for work and rest.

God of all time and all people,
we pray for those whose diaries are so full
that they have no time to pause,
We pray for those who carry heavy burdens
of care and feel crushing pressure everyday..
May they find a space to allow your Spirit in.

God of every moment and every person,
we pray for those whose days are lonely and
dull for whom the hours are long and the day
stretches empty into night.
May they find your presence bringing comfort
in their loneliness

Give us grace to see where we might lift
pressure from the overwhelmed, or bring joy
to those who long for life to be more. Amen
Adapted from Susan Durbar URC prayer handbook

The Lords Prayer

Hymn 504: May the mind of Christ my Saviour
[May The Mind Of Christ My Saviour \(John & Dot Pipet\) \[StF504\] - YouTube](#)

May the mind of Christ my Saviour,
live in me from day to day,
by his love and power controlling
all I do or say.

May the word of God dwell richly
in my heart from hour to hour,
so that all may see I triumph
only through his power.

May the peace of God my Father
rule my life in everything,
that I may be calm to comfort
sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me
as the waters fill the sea,
him exalting, self-forgetting,
this is victory .

May I run the race before me
strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus
as I onward go.

Kate Barclay Wilkinson 1859-1928

Blessing

May God be our comfort and our strength,
Our hope and support.
our light and our way.
And the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer,
Life-giver, remain with us always.
Amen Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

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