

All Saints C 2022 RCL
Ephesians 1:11-23; Psalm 149; Luke 6:20-31
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St. John's Sharon

At some point, I'm guessing most of us have worn ourselves out getting ready for some holiday or other. Maybe you spent multiple days making pies, cookies, turkeys, or other favorites until you weren't sure if it was hotter inside or outside of the oven and you never wanted to eat anything again. Maybe after hours of decking various halls and decorating various hearths, you had to stay up half the night wrapping and arranging presents for Christmas morning. Maybe you spent a couple days in trains, planes, and automobiles, spending an unexpected night in an airport terminal or driving through lake effect snow until you promised yourself you will never sing White Christmas again. Maybe you have assembled for your child the perfect Easter outfit, complete with adorable Eastern bonnet, and then spent an seemingly endless amount of time to actually get them to wear it.

Our preparations for our most important and meaningful times can be hard work and exhausting. Yet we are driven to do such work, and sustained through it, because we are part of something bigger, and that something bigger is deeply rooted in love.

We gather for holidays because we are part of a family of love that is present now, that extends into the past, and that carries into the future. We cook traditional dishes, and maybe even the recipes of parents or grandparents that aren't with us. We give gifts and bake treats and play games that delight the youngest among us so that they experience love and joy as richly as we can provide it. We see people we love but maybe haven't seen regularly, people who bring to the celebration their own blessings to share, whether a homemade dainty, an endless supply of amusing stories or a new baby with us for the first time. In many ways, these moments of celebration and loving community are the point of life. Our day-to-day lives and especially our times of preparation and expectation are marked and measured by the rhythm of such festive occasions.

Today we celebrate the feast of All Saints Day. All Saints Day is November 1, and we now move it to the following Sunday so we can stop and recognize its importance and its lessons for us. Perhaps the primary point this day teaches us is that we are part of a family much bigger than ourselves that is rooted in love.

In a very real way, all of our lives are a preparation for a coming banquet that will include a multitude of guests in the presence of Jesus with more love and joy than we can conceive. Paul talks about it in our reading from Ephesians this way: *the hope to which he has called you, ... the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and ... the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe.* Through the immeasurable greatness of the power of God, we can expect an inheritance that is glorious, filled with riches that only God can bestow, and that brings together all of God's children from every time and place. Our lives are moving us toward nothing less. When life seems amazing, we are holding God's hand as he leads us forward. When

life is oh-so-hard, God is probably carrying us to this place of rest and hope. The more we look for God in the midst of everything, the more blessed we will be in this time of preparing.

Paul offers something else to his readers, however. He prays that we will recognize what we are to receive. He asks God that the eyes of our hearts are enlightened so that we might live to the praise of God's glory and have a spirit of wisdom and revelation. Why? Because life is hard work sometimes and we won't get through it without a clear sense of where we are going and why.

Imagine being put in the position of having to do all the work of holiday preparation without any holiday. Stay up all night and arrange empty cardboard boxes under the tree. Spend a day making fillings and rolling pastry dough and baking a unique delicacy from your family's heritage, but know that no one is coming to eat it. Or travel on the busiest, craziest, most delay-filled day of the year, only to arrive at an empty house.

In such situations we wouldn't spend the time and energy to prepare anything. But our anticipated joy sparks the preparations. Our love compels us to continue. Our family allows us to find satisfaction in the aches at the end of a hard day.

In the same way, we allow the Great Communion of Saints to support us as we prepare ourselves for the heavenly banquet. Our love for those who have gone before, our love for those to come, and our love for those walking beside us in this life right now supplies the motivation to do the work we are called to do. The support we receive from this glorious company encourages and commends us as we press on to completion.

On All Saints Day we remind ourselves that we are surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses so that we never forget the incredible grace that encompasses and enfolds us. We would never want to forget our hope, or ignore our community, or lose sight of the beauty and glory we are offered. So we call to mind today a small sliver of the individuals and categories of saints that share this communion with us. We look to the figures in the reredos or in the All Saints chapel or in our stained glass windows, and we see great Biblical saints, past members of our congregation, and unknown people who have loved and served God in their own day. We will pray for many of our loved ones who have already entered into the fullness of life today. We would also mention some of the saints who are still to come in our families and in our parish, but we don't know their names yet. We only know that when our time comes to enter the joys of heaven, we will cheer them on in their earthly race with the enthusiasm and support of the most devoted grandparents at their grandchildren's sporting events. Later in the service, we will even join with all the saints in this Great Communion of heavenly choirs as we proclaim, "Holy, Holy, Holy".

All of this connection and support is important because a Christian life of love is sacrificial hard work. Caring for children, or for the aged, or for the sick, is hard work. Maintaining a marriage is hard work. Giving generously to the poor and the needy and to organizations that strengthen the common good is hard work. Turning off the TV and opening the Bible is hard work. Loving our enemies, doing good to those who hate us, blessing everyone including those who hate us, and praying for those who abuse us is all exceptionally hard work. Turning the other cheek and

giving to everyone who asks of us is painfully hard work. Doing unto others as we would have them do unto us ends up being so much harder work than it sounds. And sometimes the hardest work of all is honestly believing that God loves us, in all our sinfulness and brokenness, so much that he sent his only Son to ensure that we would be part of the Great Communion of All the Saints with him for all eternity.

So take time today to recognize the great saints surrounding you and think about how they can support you. Whatever your largest challenges in life, there are saints that have struggled with similar issues and overcome them. Whatever fears you face, there are saints who were terrified of the same things and managed to allow God's love to cast out their fear. Whatever weaknesses beset you, there are saints who had the same weakness to an even larger degree, and they found a way to allow God's power to be made perfect through them in precisely those weaknesses. If you are tired and overwhelmed there are saints who can lift you up and encourage you on, or who can watch over you while you sleep and let you lay down your burdens for a while.

One aspect of what we do in prayer is reconnecting with God and the saints around us. We don't pray to the saints the way we pray to God. Praying to God involves praise and worship and adoration, as well as simply entering God's presence and being transformed by the power of his Holy Spirit. Prayer involving the saints is more like a phone call to a friend. We can share our burdens and listen for what response they might make in our holy imaginations. We can ask for help or to celebrate our successes. The saints are all around us and eager to support us if we take the time to engage with them. We can look for those we identify with, draw from their inspiration, and lean on them for assistance.

However we think about the saints around us or choose to engage with them, we remind ourselves today that we are not alone in our Christian life. We are a part of a family that includes myriads of our siblings in Christ, as well as countless throngs of angels, all of whom surround that great throne of Christ. We are getting ourselves ready for an eternal banquet with them that far surpasses any earthly holiday party we have ever prepared for.