

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh
October 31, 2021- The Feast of All Saints (B)
Given at St. Mark's Church, Bridgewater, CT

Wisdom 3.1-9; Psalm 24; Rev 21.1-6; John 11.32-44

"In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be a disaster...but they are at peace... the faithful will abide with him in love." (Wisdom 3) †

Today we celebrate All Saint's Day, which occurs tomorrow, Nov 1st. If we look at some 'traditional' pictures of Saints, we often notice this ring-like thing around their heads. A Halo... it symbolizes 'holiness.' It tells us that this person is considered 'Holy,' that is someone who leads a good life devoted to God. In Old English, the word for saint comes from Halo: *'Hallow.'* A saint was called a 'hallow' and many saints were *Hallowen* = 'Holy ones.' And for Centuries the Church has remembered these Holy ones on All Saint's Day or All Hallow Day, and the evening before is known as Hallowen Eve, also called Halloween! Saints are those who are holy, who reflect God. For Christians, saints share the teachings of Jesus Christ and his Love. In our tradition, a saint is anyone who strengthens and encourages a believer on his/ her journey.

We often think of saints as famous people who have died and it's important to remember, as we heard in the reading from Wisdom, they never really leave. St Paul tells us in his letter to Hebrews (12.1) that we "are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses" to encourage us and guide us, and also in his letter to Timothy (2 Tim 1.5) that our faith comes from others, "a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and now, I am sure, lives in you."

The triad of All Hollow's Eve, All Saints and All Souls, have been important autumn celebrations in the Church for so long. Unfortunately, they have become trivialized, like so many religious holidays. The commercialism that comes with Halloween is merely a symptom of that trivialization. The real problem comes from the fact that our society wants to distance itself from the unknown... it is afraid of uncertainty. As a culture, we fear death—this is sad, because our lives our finite and existence in this world is time-bound; we all know we are going to die. As Christians, we claim to have the faith and conviction that allows us to look into the eyes of a dying friend, and say, "I know I shall see you again.'

The lovely aspect of All Hollow's Eve (Halloween) is the ability to use humor and ridicule to counter our fears of the 'unknown,' We encourage children to dress up and make fun of those terrifying visions of beasts and monsters that have so long been a part of our culture. The celebration of Halloween uses joy and humor to dispel fear. If only more of us in our society would do this, there may be less cruelty, hostility, and division. Similarly, the celebrations of All Saint's and All Soul's remember the joy of those who have gone on before us to 'the heavenly places.' Those we love, who are no longer here. There is no doubt that our world is a scary place. And remember what St Paul assured

us, 'Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus' (Rom 8.38). A saint is anyone who is a witness to Jesus and a model of Jesus. Early on, Christians referred to one another as 'saints.' Worship was known as the gathering of the saints. It's a gathering of those who model their life on Christ. At our Cathedral, Dean Howell still proclaims this at the beginning of the service, she shouts, 'Good morning Saints!' Saints come in all shapes and sizes...

This Stole I wear today is perhaps my favorite stole. It was an ordination gift given to me when I became a priest, by the children of the first parish I served. They made it from pieces of their own T-shirts and dresses, to remind me of them, so I wouldn't forget them or their love for me, and (as they said) of Jesus' love for all of us! Because of that love, it's my favorite stole, made by little saints in my life. You see, saints are not just famous ancient people who did something big. Saints are all of those in our lives who remind us about Jesus and His Love for us! Saints are holy because they point to Jesus. We all know many people in our lives that are saints.

I invite us today to consider all the saints in our lives— past, present, and future. Those who live out the love of God and those who point to Jesus and Jesus ways.

We all can be saints... we all are saints... whenever we live in love and point others to Jesus! †