

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh  
November 1, 2020- Feast of All Saints  
Given at St. Mark's Church, Bridgewater, CT

Revelation 7: 9-17; Psalm 34; 1 John 3: 1-3; Matthew 5: 1-12  
**"... and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." †**

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Well, it's been almost a year since I've been blessed to join you all here... and as I prayed about what I was going to say today on this weekend before the great National Election, I pondered about what a very strange and difficult year this has been for all of us. And I thought about the triad of All Hollow's Eve, All Saints and All Souls. These 3 days have always been important autumn celebrations in the Church. Unfortunately, they've become trivialized like so many religious holidays. The commercialism that comes with Halloween is merely a symptom of that trivialization. Yet this year, in the midst of a great pandemic and uncertainty about health, life, and death, we get a glimpse that the real problem comes from the fact that our society wants to distance itself from the unknown. It's afraid of uncertainty. To speak of saints and souls sounds creepy, because our culture fears death. That's sad, because our lives are finite and existence in this world is time-bound; we all know we're going to die. And as Christians, we claim to have the faith and conviction that death is not the end... it's only the beginning!

Part of the charm of All Hollow's Eve (Halloween) is our ability to use humor and ridicule to counter the fear of the 'unknown,' We encourage children to dress up and make fun of those terrifying beasts and monsters that have so long been a part of our culture, shouting in the face of potential injury or death. Right now, we live in a time of fear, and things just aren't the way they used to be. Halloween gives us a chance to use joy and humor to dispel that fear. Similarly, on All Saint's we remember the joy of those who have gone on before us to 'the heavenly places.' And we remember what John said, "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... what will be has not yet been revealed. What we know is this... we will be like him, for we will see him as he is" (1 John 3:1-3). Saints are those who have caught that glimpse of the Kingdom, who've followed God's will, and seen God's world. And they hand that glimpse (of God's world, God's will, and God's love) on to us. The *BCP* (p 862) states that the "Communion of Saints is the whole family of God, the living and the dead, those whom we love and those whom we hurt, bound together by sacrament, prayer, and praise."

So often, the saints seem hidden or out of reach. The reality is that we are all saints, called to live in this earthly habitat thankful to God for what we've been given, living in unity, living a life of Christ-like love for others. To be agents of reconciliation in a world of hatred and division... in a society that wishes to separate everyone into categories. And, we know we're never alone, a great 'cloud of witnesses' is always with us! That's a good thing to remember these days, as our nation and its people face serious divisions. All over, there's a painful dynamic: a constant barrage of cruelty, hostility, and division; dismissive attacks on everyone. No group is safe—

Republican, Independent, Democrat... liberal, moderate, or conservative... women/ men... blacks/ whites, gays/straights... Mexicans, Europeans, Asians... There's an unhealthy climate of fear based on difference. And there's an unhealthy need to be right, to hold anyone who disagrees with us in contempt.

Given this climate, I believe Matthew's rendition of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is welcome and helpful. It comes after Jesus made his circuit tour around Galilee healing the sick and curing those inured and afflicted by physical and mental illness; just after the story of how he met Peter and Andrew and the other disciples fishing and bid them "follow me and I will make you fishers of people." This version of the beatitudes is meant to teach the people... a summation of Jesus teachings to his disciples. These "blessed are" sayings remind us, it's not about 'an eye for an eye'... that only leads to blindness. Its not about hatred... that only leads to darkness and evil. It's about the fact that God loves us and 'will wipe away every tear' from our eyes. "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" (Mt 5.12). Because Christ has blessed us, we are able to bless those who set themselves against us... we are able to pray for our antagonists, to forgive, and not seek retaliation or retribution.

This is no easy task... it helps to remember that we are not alone. We have the saints who have come before us... those known and unknown... the saints in this parish, and the saints out there in the world...the saints we've met and the saints we've have yet to meet... and they show us that a life of unity and love of others is possible. Their witness reveals that although difficult, it's possible to look death in the face and know that new life is just around the corner.

As we come to the altar on this morning, may each of us vow to follow the example of Jesus, to be the "Blessed" and join with that great cloud of witnesses, to live and love as the family of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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