

Let us pray,

O merciful Creator, your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature: Make us always thankful for your loving providence; and grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

On the world-wide Christian calendar (those days agreed upon by all liturgical traditions) today is the feast of All Saints. All Saints' Sunday has been celebrated by the Church for over twelve hundred years. This is the day of the year on which we intentionally remember and celebrate the lives of those saints who have gone before us.

For most of us, the word "saint" conjures up visions of those who have their own days; people like St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke and St. John – who are credited with writing the four Gospels. Or maybe you think of St. Michael the Archangel, the warrior angel, protector of heaven and patron of soldiers. Or perhaps it's St. George who, legend has it, converted thousands when he slew a dragon; or St. Patrick who converted many Irish people (legend says) by driving all the snakes out of Ireland.

If you're like most, you probably think of these people as being "bigger than life," or "holier" than any of us could ever be. [An Episcopal Dictionary of the](#)

Church, written by the Rev. Dr. Don Armentrout, describes this vision of saints as applying the term to, “‘elite’ Christians whose lives were distinguished and exemplary because of their self-sacrifice, witness, virtue, or accomplishments¹.” Dr. Armentrout says that most Christians subconsciously tie the word “saint” to the feast of All Martyrs, which dates back to the third century and remains a time for celebrating all who have given up their lives on behalf of Christ. But that is really not what a “saint” is at all. That is only one *kind* of saint.

Again from the Episcopal Dictionary, a saint is “A holy person, *a faithful Christian, one who shares life in Christ.*”² And author Donald Attwater says,

The English word ‘saint’ is derived from the Latin epithet *sanctus*, which represents the Greek *hagios* (*hagios*) and the Hebrew *qâdosh*. When applied to people and things they meant hallowed, consecrated, *set apart for a sacred purpose* ...’; they did not of themselves necessarily connote that high moral quality which is now inseparable from such words as saint or holy when applied to a person.³

So while the word, “saint” may seem a little intimidating to us because of the stature of some of the saints who have lived throughout history, we *shouldn’t* be that intimidated, because those great saints were just people, exactly like you and me. They were “set apart for a sacred purpose,” sanctified by God – exactly like WE have been – it’s just that they had different missions than we do.

¹ p454

² Id.

³ The Penguin Book of Saints Penguin Books, Ltd., Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, ©1965, p7
Fr. John Bedingfield

We are *all* set apart and sanctified by God to do God's work in the world. That's what our baptisms were about. In baptism and then again in confirmation, we each had hands laid on us and we were blessed – *sanctified* – and identified as children of God whom God had thereby anointed with the power of the Holy Spirit to go into the world as disciples of Jesus Christ. We are *all* saints.... *YOU* are all saints.... Each and every one of you *is a saint!*

This morning we celebrate our sainthood and the sainthood of that “great cloud of witnesses” who fill this church today. But on this particular All Saints' Day, we celebrate much more. Today – Thanksgiving Sunday – we also celebrate the grace-filled abundance of the gifts given freely and (I believe) joyfully to us by the One who created all things. Today, we intentionally give thanks for *all* of God's gifts to us: the gift of talents and abilities, which allow us to do good work that delights and enriches us; the gift of time – time to work and play, time to worship and rest, time to recharge and time to lavishly spend with others; the gift of treasure – our money and belongings – with which we have been blessed in order for us to be able to bless others; and the gift of relationship – with those we love and those we don't, and relationship with God in Christ.

Today we give thanks, both corporately (when we pray together) and singly (when we bring forward the items representing our lives and when we individually decide how to fill out our pledge cards). These expressions of our thankfulness are

statements of how we understand God. But they are also expressions of how we understand ourselves, either as people who live in the midst of abundance or as ones who are surrounded by scarcity.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Some commentators say that Jesus' command to Lazarus should be a symbol for us of His invitation to us all. Jesus calls all who are "dead" in any way to "come out" and be unbound. Our Lord calls us all: the forgotten, the lonely and those who have been abandoned by false gods; the false gods of power, things, money and prestige. Today, Jesus says to us all, "Come out and let this great cloud of witnesses, the saints of God, unbind you. Let my love for you and the unbidden power of the Spirit of God loose every tie that keeps you downtrodden."

Today we give thanks for the God who abundantly gives to and cares for us. It is this same God – the one who freed the children of Israel from slavery; brought water from a rock and manna from heaven; the one who gave the Israelites a promise land of milk and honey; who gave us the prophets to teach and correct us; this one, the Creator of all this is, is the one who became a human being in order to show us the redemptive, loving face of God. Through this same God, incarnate in the person of Jesus, we have been given the ultimate gifts, forgiveness of our sin and everlasting life.

In that Spirit of abundant grace, Jesus called Lazarus out of death into life and out of being bound by his funeral wraps into perfect freedom in Christ. Today, He calls us the same way. And for that we should give constant, unceasing praise and thanks.

We have much to be thankful for today. We are here together in the freest nation on earth. In many parts of the world we could be arrested and executed for this meeting. Thanks be to God. We are a part of a Church that is much larger than just this one congregation. Our worship today is being replicated, or at least done with similar substance all over the globe. I give thanks for that. A multitude of saints has gone before us – some known and some unknown – who now surround us in this place, praying for us and offering their strength to us as we live out our own calling. And then there are the more tangible things.

Today there is not a person in this room who will go hungry, or suffer because he or she has to do without clean water or shelter. We have our immediate needs met in ways that much of the world does not. And we have each other. Many in the world can only dream of having a church home like this one, filled with other caring, generous and loving Christians.

Listen today for the call of Jesus. “Come out!” Come out of whatever tomb life has put you in – or which you have made for yourself. Call on that mighty cloud of witnesses who are the Saints of God to help you become unbound by the

things in life that hold you back. Give thanks for all you have and then give back in the same way God has given to you: freely, joyfully and in a manner that is filled with the endless grace of God.

Happy Thanksgiving Day! Thanks be to God for all saints, for the gifts of this life, and most of all for the gift of God's Son as our savior and witness to everlasting salvation.

Amen.