

Date: October 31, 2021 (All Saints' Day)

1. Texts: Isaiah 25:6-9; Ps. 24; Revelation 21:1-6a; John 11:32-44. (Propers BAS pp. 427-429)
2. Subject: All Saints' Day.
3. Topic: the reality of lower-case s saints.
4. Aim: encourage.
5. Proposition: "The saints of God minister with us now."

## FOR ALL THE SAINTS NOW

I don't pray for the deceased. I pray most fervently for the dying.  
Lord God, hold this person tightly to your breast. May she hear the soft tones of your voice as she makes the last journey in this life. Calm her fears. Soothe her soul. Empower her to choose your love and your life. Be with her, now and always. This I beg in Jesus' name. Amen.

I certainly pray for the dying.

But I think that the deceased have already made their choices and their futures are already decided. I don't think they can benefit from my prayers.

There are two implications from this theology.

First, while I don't think the deceased can benefit from my prayers, I may need to benefit from praying, especially for myself. I may need to pray for my own faith.

Lord God, grant me the courage to trust my loved one to your never-ending care, compassion and love. Soothe my anxieties. Fill the empty space in my soul left by this death. Be with me, as I am certain you are with my loved one now. This I beg in Jesus' name. Amen.

Second, while I don't think the deceased can benefit from my prayers, I may need to benefit from theirs. I bet that's a surprise.

You see, the deceased are only dead, not eradicated. Those who die in the faith and grace of God are still alive, just not in this universe. We're stuck inside time, space and human experience. The dead are released from those limitations.

According to the Letter to the Hebrews, they are this great cloud of witnesses who are involved in our race.<sup>1</sup> So, they can pray for us.

I can't know exactly what their prayers are like, just as I can't know the intercessions of the Holy Spirit, who intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.<sup>2</sup> The deceased know so much more about us and our circumstances. The deceased look at this creation from the outside and can see the larger picture. They are the ultimate prayer warriors. We need their prayers.

That's part of what we celebrate today when we celebrate All Saints' Day. We celebrate with joy the fact that the saints in heaven do intercede for us here on earth. They are not disconnected from our lives. The love of God working through them reached out to us before their deaths and continues to reach out to us now.

This is really crucial stuff.

On All Saints' Day we celebrate the love of those whose relationship with God became a channel for his grace and power. We're not celebrating only those people whose first name is "Saint". The people who have been recognized as capital S saints already have their own saints' days. Today we hardly pay any attention to Sts Peter, Paul or Mary. On this day, we celebrate the lower-case s saints, the everyday people whose love for God has poured his grace and power into our lives. These are the people behind that song inspired by Francis of Assisi:

Make me a channel of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me bring love.

Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord, and where there's doubt, true faith in you.

These are the saints we celebrate today.

And so this really should be the saints who pray for us now. As they were able to channel God's grace and power to us during their lives here, so may their prayers channel that same grace and power to us now.

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 12:1.

<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:26.

There's a little twist in this.

Since we're celebrating All Saints' Day, we're kind of obligated to cooperating with their prayers. That is, we're asking them to pray for us, and so we're stuck working with those prayers.

But we don't know exactly what those prayers are. We'll have to make some well-informed guesses.

A quick read through St. Paul's prayer life outlines what the capital S Saints are praying for us. It's safe to assume that the all the saints will have the same intentions for us.

That quick read highlights the saints are praying for us, particularly that we might *have courage, pray for the whole community of faith, and that God's love might flow out from us.*

That God-inspired courage is to be used in the proclamation of the gospel of salvation. We are to pray so that the entire Christian community might grow and be encouraged by the presence of the Holy Spirit. God's love is never just an individual experience—it is to flood out through the Church to touch the world beyond.

We are celebrating All Saints' Day. Therefore, we ask the saints to pray for us. We must cooperate with their prayers.

So, we accept the encouragement of the Holy Spirit and actually make attempts to proclaim the gospel of salvation. We work to fulfill our own prayers for the sake of the Church, by supporting its growth and well-being. We channel God's love, which we have already experienced, out to the society around us.

This cooperation with the prayers of the saints occurs both as individual disciples and as the Body of Christ. You see, the dead are only dead and not thereby removed from the Body of Christ. They are separated from us only by

death, but their membership in the whole Body is not destroyed. They all are a part of us as we all are a part of one another. We share in God's answers to their prayers by cooperating with them.

I can't pray for the dead. I must pray for the dying. And I beg all the saints, whether living or deceased, to pray for me. But to honour all the saints, we must cooperate in God's answers to the prayers of the saints. That's how we celebrate All Saints' Day.

AMEN.