

Feast of All Saints – Year C

A Sermon Preached by The Rev Ian M Delinger

on November 2, 2025

Daniel 7:1-3,15-18 / Psalm 149 / Ephesians 1:11-23 / Luke 6:20-31

*Adorned in the blood of Your Martyrs throughout all the world as in purple and fine linen,
Your Church, through them, does cry unto You, O Christ God,
“Send down Your compassion upon Your people;
grant peace to Your commonwealth, and great mercy to our souls.”*

Last week, King Charles III of the United Kingdom and Pope Leo XIV prayed together in the Sistine Chapel. It was the first time in over 500 years that the Supreme Governor of the Church of England and the Bishop of Rome have prayed together, and the significance and genuineness of the event was not lost on anyone.

One significance of the prayerful moment between the British Royals and the Pope is the symbol of the catholicity of the Church. And when I speak of the Church, I mean the Body of Christ. It is sometimes difficult to a true believer in the catholicity of the Church because of the co-opting of the term “Catholic” by the Church of Rome. The term “catholic” means “universal”, and non-Roman Catholics believe themselves to be a part of the universal Church, which belongs to Christ, not just Rome.

We recite in the Nicene Creed: *We believe in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.* I’ve been asked many times what that means since we are not Roman Catholic.

The Church is catholic because it proclaims the whole Faith to all people, to the end of time.

That’s how the Catechism states it. The Church is catholic because it proclaims a universal faith universally to all people to the end of the universe. The Church

catholic, or the Church Universal, doesn't belong to the Pope, or to Episcopalians; it belongs to Jesus Christ, and we are all a part of it in our own particular way. As the former Presiding Bishop Michael Curry would say, we are the Episcopal Branch of the Jesus Movement in this place.

The commemoration of All Saints is a prime occasion for celebrating the catholicity of the Church. We take this moment to remember at least 2,000 years of everyday people who devoted their lives to proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, to seeking and serving Christ in all persons, and to striving for justice and peace among all people. From the Apostles and The Marys, to the founders of the monastic movements, to 17C & 18C progenitors of modern social work, to the Modern Martyrs from every continent who are immortalized on the western façade of Westminster Abbey, to the teenage gamer who is Rome's most recent saint, these ordinary people who did extraordinary things in the name of Jesus serve as role models for our own virtuous and godly living. The cloud of witnesses of the Church Triumphant is a witness to the catholicity of the church, the universality of the church, the never-endingness of the Body of Christ! For those of us who acknowledge the saints in some way, they bridge that gap of denominational divisiveness that makes the human *institution* of the Church a fractured collection of cliques.

Recognizing the catholicity – the universality – of the Church is embedded in today's readings. Daniel reminds us that this world, this universe, our reason for being here does not and did not start with us:

...the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea...

...the 4 winds as the 4 corners of the earth, from which the eschatological kingdoms of heaven and earth come. Daniel's vision is a witness to the beginning of time and history as well as the end of time and history. Those kingdoms and that time and history encompass all of us, all that has come before, and all that will come after.

But it is Luke who brings together all the different parts of what we believe into the one single, endless, timeless kingdom that the universal Body of Christ was, is and ever shall be. Luke's version of the Beatitudes, his Blessings & Woes, addresses everyday people who are called to be witnesses of and for the Kingdom of Heaven – in that time and forevermore.

Distinct from Matthew's Beatitudes that open the Sermon on the Mount (which we will hear at next year's All Saints' Day), Luke's Blessings & Woes address the Disciples themselves. Those listening to Jesus – they are the poor, the hungry, the weepers, and the excluded; not some unnamed, unknown, hypothetical third persons as in Matthew. The poverty, hunger, weeping, and exclusion are made real and present. But so, too, are the Kingdom of God, the fulfillment, the laughter, and the reward made present.

Those whom we regard as saints followed this pattern of the Blessings & Woes over the centuries. They were either the poor, hungry, weepers and excluded, like Marcella who devoted herself to a life of asceticism to chastity, poverty, fasting, prayer; or they served the poor, hungry, weepers and excluded, like Mother Teresa of Calcutta who she and her contemporaries and successors have dedicated their lives to serving the poorest of the poor, not only in the slums of Calcutta, now in over 133 countries, managing homes for those dying from HIV/AIDS, leprosy, and tuberculosis, as well as running soup kitchens, dispensaries, mobile clinics, orphanages, and schools. And they looked toward God's future in their dismal present, while looking toward and being part of God's Kingdom to rectify these inequalities.

People like these are deemed 'saints' and proclaimed 'blessed' because God can and does use them, and God can and will uphold them in the end. And we believe their actions, their bravery, their integrity, their faith to be beyond our own capabilities. Sure. I get it. Every Wednesday when we read the biography of the person whom the Church commemorates that day, I think to myself,

I don't have the energy to finish reading this biography let alone attempt any of the stuff that this person has done!

Yet...I have just acknowledged the universality of the Church by expressing the inspiration that I have received through the life and ministry of this person. And maybe I can't or won't accomplish what they did. That's not the point. What can I accomplish because I'm a follower of Jesus Christ? What is *my* poverty, hunger, weeping, and exclusion, and where does it lead me to make the downtrodden of the Kingdom of God fulfilled and the divine reward be present?

- I don't have to do what Edward Pusey did to make the Kingdom of God be present to the poor of England by establishing churches for the poor.
- I don't have to do what World Central Kitchen does to make fulfillment be present to those in war-torn or devastated areas.
- I don't have to do what Janani Luwum did to make not laughter, but peace of mind, be present by protesting dictator Idi Amin's arbitrary killings and unexplained disappearances.
- I don't have to do what Katharine Drexel did to make the divine reward be present to the needs of the excluded communities of Native Americans and African Americans in the southern and western United States.

But I can be inspired by 2,000 years of accomplishments, attempts and even failures of the saints to do what I can do to make the Kingdom of God present ... to even just one person.

It's not just Kings and Popes who show us that the Body of Christ is bigger than any humanmade institution or earthly concept we can imagine. It's the saints, the everyday people who just get on with doing what God has called them to do that reminds us that the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is not just those of us huddled here this morning in this historic building since 1867.

- It's the case workers who spend every day struggling with the unhoused and their social-emotional issues so that they may find a home within the Kingdom of God;
- It's the churches across the country who have prepared to provide holy fulfillment to those who might go hungry and lose their SNAP benefits in the coming days;
- It's those who sit with those children who weep because their parents were abducted and detained and deported so that one day they may experience righteous laughter;
- and it's my seminary classmate – the first transgender priest in the Church of England – traversing that small island to make the divine reward be present to those who continue to be excluded both, by the institution, and by those who claim to follow the teachings of Jesus.

We are just one part of the Church Universal, bound together with the saints who have gone before us: the Church Triumphant leading the Church Militant to God's will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. And we are among those whose vocation and daily work may not get them a sainthood, but which is definitely saintly.

Can we be like the saints who, throughout time and history, we have praised as models of Christ-like living, living out of grace, living in hope of God's redemption, and being a sign of that hope? When we do this, we don't just do that for the people in front of us, for the reputation of St Stephen's. We do this for the Church Universal, the Body of Christ.

Our reading from Ephesians reminds us:

Jesus has put all things under His feet and has made Him the head over all things for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

That is not just here in this place – it is universal ... it is “catholic”. The whole of God’s purpose – from the beginning in Creation to today and what is to come – focuses in and through Christ, whose mystical Body we have been, are and will be. Jesus Himself is the universal ‘place’ in which the blessings of God have been, are and will be known: not just here in our small building, but every place throughout the world and throughout time. The commemoration of the saints reminds us that Christ is the hope for the world and the final reconciliation with God and Creation, our journey’s beginning and end, the kingdom that we shall receive and possess for ever and ever.