Remembrance Sunday: Held in the Communion of Saints

A sermon for Remembrance Sunday, All Souls, and the celebration of baptism

Readings: Wisdom 3:1-9; Psalm 116:1-8; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 6:37-40

November is a month of remembrance. As the days grow shorter and the landscape settles into the quiet of winter, the Church invites us to remember those who have gone before us: to give thanks, to grieve, and to renew our hope in God's promises.

All Saints Day celebrates the lives and witness of the faithful. All Souls Day draws us close to those whom we have loved and lost. Remembrance Sunday calls us to honour those who have died in war and conflict, and to renew our commitment to peace.

These observances are distinct but deeply connected. Each asks us to consider life and death, the enduring nature of love, and the communion we share with those who have gone before us. Each brings us back to the hope given through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And today, as we celebrate baptism, we see that hope taking shape among us. Baptism reminds us that our lives are not isolated journeys. We are drawn into Christ and into a family of faith stretching across generations, embracing the living and the departed, those whose names we know and those known only to God.

At the heart of our remembrance is this assurance: we belong to God, and nothing—not even death—can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

The souls of the righteous are in the hands of God

Our reading from the Book of Wisdom offers a comforting affirmation in the face of death: "The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them."

Those words speak to the heart of All Souls Day. We remember parents and grandparents, spouses and children, friends and neighbours: people whose lives shaped our own, whose love sustained us, and whose absence we still feel.

Some memories bring joy. Others bring sadness, or the ache of unfinished conversations and hopes that were never fulfilled. Often gratitude and grief come together. We can be thankful for a life and still long desperately to hear that person's voice again.

Wisdom does not ask us to pretend that death is easy. It acknowledges that death can look like defeat, as though a life has simply ended and its hopes have been extinguished. Yet it declares that this is not the whole truth. Where we see loss, God holds the departed in divine love.

“The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God.” This is not a promise that faith will spare us suffering, or that grief will cease to hurt. It is the assurance that death does not remove us from God’s presence. Those we love are not erased or forgotten. They are held in the mercy of the One who created them.

We remember because we love. We also remember because we trust that God remembers. When our own hands can no longer hold those we love, we entrust them to the hands of God.

All Saints: The great company of the faithful

All Saints Day broadens our vision. We remember not only those we knew personally, but the great company of the faithful whose lives have borne witness to Christ throughout the ages.

Some saints are famous, remembered for extraordinary courage, wisdom, or holiness. Most are not. They are ordinary people who have lived faithfully in ordinary circumstances: caring for others, persevering through hardship, forgiving when forgiveness was difficult, and serving without seeking recognition.

Perhaps the saints closest to our hearts are a parent who taught us to pray, a friend who stood beside us in a difficult season, a teacher whose wisdom still guides us, or a parish member whose quiet faithfulness helped shape this community.

Their lives remind us that holiness is not always dramatic. Sometimes it is a patient word, a meal shared, a visit made, or a kindness offered when no one else is watching. Through such lives, we have glimpsed the love of Christ. Their witness becomes part of the faith we carry.

The Church calls this belonging the Communion of Saints. All who belong to Christ are united in him across the boundaries of time and death. The Church is more than the congregation in this building. It includes those who have gone before us, those beside us now, and those who will come after us.

At the Eucharist, we join our voices with the whole company of heaven. In baptism, we welcome others into that same communion. They enter a story that began long before us and will continue long after we are gone. We do not create this family today. We receive its newest members with joy, and promise to walk beside them.

Remembrance and the hope of resurrection

First Peter names the foundation of our hope: “By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

Christian remembrance is not simply looking backwards. We remember the departed because we believe their lives are held within God’s continuing purposes. Christ’s resurrection does not make grief disappear, but it assures us that death is not the final word.

The risen Christ has entered the depths of human suffering and death and opened the way to new life. Peter calls this a living hope: not a vague wish that things might somehow be better, but trust in the God who raised Jesus from the dead. That hope allows us to mourn honestly without surrendering to despair.

It also shapes our observance of Remembrance Sunday. We honour those who died in war and conflict. We remember those who continue to bear its physical and emotional wounds, and the families and communities marked by loss.

To remember them is to recognize the preciousness of human life. Our remembrance must call us towards peace, justice, and reconciliation. We cannot undo the suffering of the past, but we can refuse to let remembrance become merely a ceremony, disconnected from the way we live.

As Christians, we bring this sorrow and this responsibility into the light of Christ. Our hope does not make the cost of war smaller. It makes each life matter deeply. We entrust the dead to God, and ask for grace to become people who work for peace among the living.

Baptism: Joined to Christ in life and death

And this brings us to the baptisms we celebrate today. In a service shaped by remembrance, baptism is not an interruption. It reveals the very promise on which our remembrance rests.

Baptism is a sacrament of new birth, belonging, and hope. In its waters we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection, welcomed into God's family, and made members of the Body of Christ.

It is more than the beginning of a Christian life. It proclaims the promise that sustains us throughout life and beyond death. The God who welcomes us in baptism is the God who holds us at the end of our days. The Christ who calls us into the Church promises to raise us up on the last day. The Spirit who gives us new birth sustains us through every season.

In John's Gospel, Jesus says: "Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away."

And he continues: "This is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day."

Listen to the assurance in those words: "I should lose nothing." Our hope rests not in the strength of our grasp on God, but in Christ's faithfulness to those entrusted to him. We may be weak, uncertain, or grieving. His promise remains.

We hear it for the saints whose lives inspire us, for loved ones whose absence we mourn, for those who died in war, and for those whose names are known only to God. We hear it, too, for those being baptized today. They are welcomed into the same redeeming love.

Baptism reminds us that our deepest identity is not our achievements or failures, our strength or weakness. It is the grace of God. Before we can offer anything, we are welcomed. Before we can prove ourselves, we are loved. We belong to Christ, and he promises to raise us up on the last day.

Living in the light of those we remember

Such belonging carries a responsibility. To remember the saints is to let their faith inspire our own. To remember loved ones is to give thanks for their love and carry it forward. To remember those who died in war is to renew our commitment to peace. To celebrate baptism is to promise care for those newly welcomed among us.

The lives of those who have gone before us become part of the story we pass on. But that story is taught not only through words. Those being baptized will learn what belonging to Christ means through the life of this community: through our kindness, generosity, forgiveness, compassion, and willingness to serve.

They will need more than our welcome today. They will need our prayers, our patience, and our companionship in the years ahead. The faith handed down to us is now entrusted to us to share. We honour those who nurtured us by nurturing others.

In this way, remembrance becomes an act of looking forward as well as looking back. We honour the past by living faithfully in the present. We give thanks for those who have gone before us by helping those who come after us. And we do so in hope, because the future belongs to God.

Held in the love of God

Today we hold together sorrow for those we have lost, gratitude for lives that have blessed us, remembrance of the fallen, and joy for those entering the waters of baptism. We do not have to choose between mourning and hope. In Christ, we may hold them together.

The souls of the righteous are in the hands of God. The saints of every generation belong to the communion of Christ. Those we love are not beyond the reach of God’s mercy. Those baptized today enter a family of faith that reaches beyond our sight.

And through it all we hear the promise of Jesus: “I will lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.”

So we remember with thanksgiving. We mourn with hope. We welcome with joy. And we live in the confidence that, in life and in death, we belong to God.

Amen.