All Saints' Day – 2026 – A

Revelation 7:9-17
Psalm 34:1-10, 22
1 John 3:1-3
Matthew 5:1-12

'"…and the one on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; … and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."' In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I hope these words reassure you. They give us a lens through which to reflect on those unique individuals who mattered to us, who helped shape who we are today, whose memories bring both tears and smiles, and for whom *life has changed, not ended.*

Today we remember those we love yet no longer see, only through the eyes of our hearts and the memories in our minds. Like Jesus at the tomb of his dear friend Lazarus, today we might very well weep, and sadness is a real companion. We all have those in our immediate family and inner circle whom we remember and honor this day. We also have those in the blessed communion of the faithful departed whose lives in Christ helped light the path of our sacred journey with God. Our memories, tears, and smiles reflect the lives of 'real' people whose names we will say aloud in a few moments and who make up the great cloud of witnesses, a reassuring image, indeed.

I mentioned earlier the phrase, life has changed, not ended. This is part of the Proper Preface for the Commemoration of the Dead: 'Through our Lord Jesus Christ our Lord; who rose victorious from the dead and comforts us with the *blessed hope* of everlasting life. For to your faithful people, O Lord, life is changed, not ended; and when our mortal body lies in death, there is *prepared for us a dwelling place eternal in the heavens*.'

Did you hear that? Listen again: 'blessed hope of everlasting life…..and a dwelling place eternal in the heavens.' For our dear family and friends that have gone before, we can boldly proclaim, "Death did not win! Death is not the end."

As we do our best as saints-in-progress, we too can claim this promise of God: through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, death has been defeated once and for all. As believers, we hold fast to a hope the world doesn't understand, a hope that looks forward to a time in the presence of God, his vision and plan from the beginning. As believers, we know what awaits us after our earthly pilgrimage ends: a 'dwelling place eternal in the heavens.'

As I sat with these readings this week, I thought about folks from our St. Paul's community and considered the saintly, not perfect, but saintly examples they left for us: Ruth Haines, Ruth Wiley, Sally Rode, Bill Schwinden, and the Rev. Don Smith. I visited with Sally only once, but the time was sacred. I chatted with Bill only a few times, but I found his wit and thoughtful words affirming. And if the daughters are the proverbial chip off the old block, then Ruth Haines and Ruth Wiley were indeed saints in their own right. I was privileged to experience a sense of these saints in presiding over their memorial services, and through stories with you all, and of the reality of what John writes in Revelation: '… he (God) will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more…' John continues, 'And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new."' For these five saints of St. Paul's, and those who have gone before them in this community of faith, and for you, life has changed, not ended. 'What was once corruptible will be raised incorruptible, and they will be changed,' Paul proclaims so eloquently in his Letter to the Corinthians.

As I thought and prayed over my list of saints to remember today, I was struck with the words from the Wisdom of Solomon:

‘The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish, they seemed to have died and their departure was thought to be a disaster, and their going from us to be their destruction, but they are at peace.’

As we remember our list of individual and collective saints, these words and images should offer us soothing consolation. While much of the world thinks, and maybe wonders, about what happens when one dies, we who believe are given Divine assurance regarding this reality. The writer tells us three profound truths: the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God; they are safe from all manner of torment, and they are at peace. As John of Patmos wrote in the writing of his vision of heaven, ‘ the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’

The righteous, those whose faith in and love for God animated their daily lives, are safely sheltered in God's hand. God bestowed righteousness on these saints because of their faith. Scripture is filled with the image of God’s hand(s): strong, mighty, saving, creative, and protective. What a picture for those of us whose loved ones may have endured tremendous suffering and hardships during or at the end of their lives on earth. It’s also a good reminder for those of us saints-in-progress that we, too, are engraved in the palm of his hand and need not fear or be dismayed, for his righteous right hand upholds us.

Similarly, the souls of the righteous are safe from suffering and torment. What ailed our loved ones in this world no longer has any power over them. Nothing can harm them; nothing can create pain or sorrow of body, mind, or spirit. Their tears have been dried, and a new thing is emerging. Trusting in God’s mercy, we pray that our beloved ‘may go from strength to strength in the life of perfect service in God’s heavenly kingdom’, a proclamation that God is never done with us, now or in the time to come.

Finally, the souls of the righteous 'are at peace.' They rest in the hand of God, safe from torment, in a peace illumined by light perpetual. Their souls rest from their labors and, through God's mercy, experience a transcendent peace beyond anything we can imagine.

Dear friends, with sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, we remember the palpable reality of the communion of saints and the great cloud of witnesses. We remember our dear ones in our hearts and minds, and we know that they, along with angels and Archangels, join us in our never-ending song of praise as we celebrate the holy gifts of Christ's body and blood offered for us, his holy and saintly people. May their lives be a blessing to us.

Let us pray: *Almighty God, with whom still live the spirits of those who die in the Lord, and with whom the souls of the faithful are in joy and felicity: We give you heartfelt thanks for the good examples of all your servants, who, having finished their course in faith, now find rest and refreshment. May we, with all who have died in the true faith of your holy Name, have perfect fulfillment and bliss in your eternal and everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord.* ***Amen.*** *(BCP page 503)*