



**All Saints**

**and All Souls**

All Saints Day, the day we remember the saints as a group rather than individuals, is 1<sup>st</sup> November, thus giving us Hallowe'en, a shortened form of 'All Hallow's Eve'. The difficulty for the church was that remembering the saints was less exciting than imagining the ghoulies and ghosties and four-legged beasties against which an ancient prayer guarded you, and so to divert attention from the night of 31<sup>st</sup> October, All Souls Day was instituted for 2<sup>nd</sup> November as the day for remembering those who have died. Some cultures have their own 'day of the dead,' at which they seem to have a very jolly time, but the quiet All Souls has never really caught on in this country, outside of the church, most preferring to be frightened witless on 31<sup>st</sup> October instead.

I wonder whether we hold on to Hallowe'en because of a reluctance to think about real death? Look at the way we rarely hear people say someone has died; they have "passed" and not even, "passed away." Passed what, I facetiously want to ask. Passed Go and failed to collect £200 pounds? Of course, I keep such thoughts to myself. Until now, that is!

But the Pandemic has forced us to remember that our lives are finite, and the recent upturn in cases earlier in the year than expected, along with new regulations, has unsettled us profoundly.

But the truth is that we *are* finite, and so what we do with our lives matters. Can we be saintly? Probably we'd all want to say, "No way!" but the early Christians are described as saints, (eg. **Ephesians 1:1, Acts 9: 32** in most translations) so maybe we should be less hard upon ourselves. We are not required to float in a cloud of holiness but to live our saintly lives in the messy everyday.

I think of a member of one of my first churches. By the time I met her, she had no short-term memory whatsoever, but had an open, welcoming attitude to everyone. She had lived in the same house for many, many years and was well known; the children, she told me, would come to her window and do a little dance for her. I worried a bit whether they were actually mocking her, but it turned out that I was way off the mark. Speaking after her funeral to one of the many neighbours who'd come along I was told that as children they'd always gone to her rather than to their parents when they fell down or were unhappy and, she said, it had been lovely when their own children had done exactly the same, going to 'Aunty Eva' rather than mum for a sticking plaster. And from her I found that, indeed, they had done little dances in front of her window to make her laugh. Now, I knew from the Church Secretary that things hadn't been good for her in her life, but she smiled and loved always and said nothing of the negative things. I think she would be surprised at the joyful reception she received in Heaven. A latterly-absent-minded saint.

Our imperfect selves are the selves God loves. No amount of assumed piety impresses God (**Luke 18:9-14**); he sees and knows us with all our failings. But a desire to love God more; a real desire to see his kingdom come in our world and a willingness to try to help the kingdom come in our own little corner of the world by our own quiet prayers and small good deeds, even – maybe especially - in times like the present when so many people are feeling lost and in the dark.

*Persisting* in this way of living is the way of true saintliness.



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It seems to me that this picture illustrates our calling as saints – the light God shines upon us always is there to be reflected so that others can see and find their own joy. The light breaks through the dark clouds if we are around to see and share it!

**A saint can be someone who reflects the light God brings to a dark time.**

**A saint could be you!**

Pause for a moment and think of the people you know who have been saintly in their giving of themselves; the people who seem to brighten up the day just by being there and being themselves. Thank God for them.

A prayer:

Loving God with whom is light and joy everlasting, thank you for those people

who have reflected your light in times when it has seemed very dark,

who just by being themselves have brought light wherever they were.

Thank you that such people are still around us, often living difficult lives themselves

in places and situations where darkness seems to prevail

We pray for saints who live on run-down housing estates, in refugee camps,

in sweat shops, in prisons, in places we know or have heard about, places that make us shudder; those saints who absorb your peace and give it away, freely and sometimes at their own cost.

When they feel low and weary, may they know that others think of them and pray for them

and may they know that as you walked the way before them

in the life, ministry and death of Jesus, you understand them and love them to the uttermost.

In a world that does not seem to value self-giving, nor the way of quiet sharing, we pray for those in positions of power, whether it be in politics, industry or the media, aware that they have great temptations to face: temptations to grasp more power or wealth, temptations to appear big in the eyes of the world. May they see the emptiness of what they crave, see the world through your eyes of love and feel the true strength of your love for all people so that through that knowledge, they may realise the value and holiness of the least among us.

Lord, saintliness seems a concept far from us. We do not feel saintly, especially when the little irritations and the big problems of life wear us down. Help us remember that you understand us, too, and the difficulties we face in life, and that you will never take from us the wisdom of your Spirit, the love of Jesus. Give us, we pray, the strength and purpose to be your true saints, wherever we are. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen



*Blessings, Ruth*