



Not *SOME*, but *ALL* Saints

October 31, 2021: Holy Eucharist Rite II for the Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost, All Saints' Day, and Annual Giving Campaign Kick Off
The Reverend Nick Morris-Kliment, Rector
Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA

Oh LORD: May Your Word only be spoken; and Your Word only be heard: in the name of Jesus Christ, the Living Word. Amen.

We are an outpost of the Communion of Saints here at Christ Church. You know we say it every Sunday, that we believe in the Communion of Saints. It comes just toward the end of the Apostles' Creed, which we say whenever we pray Morning or Evening Prayer.

In the New Testament, the word for "saint" means any person baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. On the one hand, it's a very low bar, fortunately. We are celebrating *All Saint's Day*, not *Some Saints*, or *These Saints but not Those Saints*. But *All Saints*. It's an exalted status conferred upon us by God, not earned; but it does entail some responsibilities.

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And it's pretty amazing, to realize the thing that really holds us wildly varied human beings together as the Body of Christ, is **God**. Not our piety, or our singing, our political views, or our Facebook groups, but **God**.

And today, on All Saints' Sunday, we are especially mindful of those people in our lives who are gone, but who are here, who we love but see no longer except perhaps in photographs, or in a piece of old clothing, or in aroma, or a gentle breeze or special place, or a piece of music, or images engraved on our hearts—which is to say, they are all around us. And of course, they don't need to be baptized. We honor those we have lost suddenly, or slowly, tragically, or peacefully. We'll say some of their names in a moment.

And by extension, we honor the suffering of those who have succumbed to COVID, to drought and famine, to political or domestic violence or mental illness, or preventable disease.

And while in the millenia-long tradition of the Church, early on in the first centuries, we had the habit of officially lifting up those who *died* because of their public confession of Christ as their Lord; and more recently we have hallowed fellow Christians who have some other claim to extraordinariness (for example the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, or Bishop Barbara Harris—who is on her way to sainthood in the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement) most saints are ordinary people like you and me. And God uses us in our ordinariness to accomplish the divine purposes.

One of my favorite hymns ever is the first hymn we sang this morning: For all the Saints. Perhaps there's a person you think of when you sing that song. For me, it's my maternal grandmother, Ruth Drury McClure. I have never been able to get through that hymn without thinking of her, without a lump in my throat and a tear in my eye. Now, as my mother was able to point out with some specificity, Grammie



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had flaws. But the ordinary kindnesses with which she showered me are as much a part of how I came to know the love of God for me as anything else.

The great reformer of the Church, Martin Luther, wrote powerful in the 16th century that all Christians are simultaneously both sinner and saint. We can't disentangle the two. Another way to put this: A word that I learned from the Carr family here at Christ Church is *flawsome*. All of us saints are both flawed and awesome. *Flawsome*.

Now as I've said, we at Christ Church are an outpost of the Communion of Saints. We are one of Needham's, earth-bound branches of the universal, intergalactic, transhistorical, metaverse of God's people, united around Jesus.

And here, through ordinary acts of love, through ministries of our parish, the extraordinary joy and hope of God are revealed to the world by saints like you and me. This has been especially in a strange and confusing time.

Just for one example: In the opening of our Confirmation Class last week, when asked about what gave them joy and hope at Christ Church, a number of parents said Sunday morning worship. It was an hour of joy and hope in their weeks. Weekly worship is the consummation of the work of many people performing ordinary acts with extraordinary love and care: the teams and individuals who have thought through the liturgies, who prepare the candles, the bread and wine, the altar vestments and chalices and patens, who polish the brass, who clean up afterward, who choose, play, and sing the music for us to sing and to listen to, who ensure that the saints at home can worship with us here; who welcome us as we come into the building, who prepare the bulletins, who read the lessons, who vacuum the carpets, who lead the procession, who lift up our prayers, who extend the banquet of the Eucharist to the upper parish hall at coffee hour... We baptized—gathered by God around the table in foretaste of the heavenly banquet that is to come—are united with all the saints who have ever come to this table, together with angels, seraphim, cherubim, with Jesus at the center, who is given for us, in the bread and wine.

And it all flows from that, the joy and hope that God desires for us and for others here in this place and out in the world: in the lessons and experiences carefully prepared for our Christian learners both young and older; in the hopeful and respectful conversations around race held in the Vestry; in the meals lovingly prepared that give hope and joy to our MANNA and B-Safe friends; in the resources and relationships shared with siblings in Haiti and the more than two dozen recipients of grants nearby and far away from the Community Concerns Committee; in the joy and hope communicated by members of our Pastoral Response Team to those in need; in the joy and hope that happens in this heated and well-maintained building where music and dance and literacy and culture and support for addicts and scouting all find a home.



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Each of us, saints, plays a part in both giving and receiving the joy and hope of God that occurs in, and moves out from, this place. "See the home of God is among mortals," John tells us in his revelation this morning.

All of this requires financial resources: We begin our annual giving campaign in Joy and Hope this weekend. You have received by email the delightful video featuring our co-chairs Jean McCarthy and Kim Rocco, as well as Baby Owen. You will receive if you haven't already, materials in the US Mail. We'll hear more from Kim in a moment. But I invite you to recall the times and places the saints at Christ Church have given you joy and hope, and more important, given you the strength and inspiration to be a source of joy and hope for others, and allowed this building to be a springboard for joy and hope in others. And be as generous as you can in your giving to support this outpost of the Communion of Saints. **Amen.**

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