

All Saints Sunday 2021
November 7th

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable in thy sight, o Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Welcome to our celebration of the great feast of All Saints. On this day, we are particularly mindful of that wonderful portion of the Great Thanksgiving:

“Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name.”

Forever. That’s a mighty long time. In fact, it is beyond all time.

There are many themes that come to mind when you and I think about the Christian faith and life:

LOVE...FORGIVENESS...JUDGMENT...RECONCILIATION...MIRACLES...HEALING...
THE CROSS...DISCIPLESHIP...RESURRECTION...ETERNAL LIFE. I am sure that you can think of others.

Here is the one that has come to mind for me on this All Saints Sunday: GRACE.

When you hear that word, “grace”, what comes to mind for you?

Do you think of the effortless beauty of a ballerina?

Do you think of the calm and poise that a quarterback exhibits in the midst of a half a dozen charging 300 pound linemen, what we have come to call, “grace under pressure”?

Do you think of that short prayer of thanksgiving offered before a meal?

What does “grace” mean to you?

Well, as I often do, I went and looked it up in Webster’s Dictionary. And amongst several other possibilities, I found this: “Divine love and protection bestowed freely on humankind. The state of being protected or sanctified by the favor of God.”

In other words, this is the state of being in which “all the saints” dwell. Whether famous or known to God alone, the saints of God live constantly and consistently, first and foremost in the grace of the living God.

Furthermore, grace is the reason for our being here together this morning. The Gospel, the Good News about Jesus Christ, is the invitation, extended by God, to live each day of this transitory life, in the state of grace.

Remember the opening of Paul’s letter to the Galatians: “Grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen”.

Despite the fact that he was a big fan of the run-on sentence, Paul here defines for those drawn to follow Jesus the truth about God’s grace.

For the Christian,

GRACE is God so loving the world, and that includes each one of us, that God sent his only Son, that we might not perish, but instead receive everlasting life.

GRACE is Jesus, The Son of God, living and dying as “one of us” that we, each one of us, might be reconciled to the God who loved us first.

GRACE is that same Jesus, risen from the dead, saying to all the saints, including each one of us, “Remember that I am with you always, to the end of the age”.

GRACE is also that peace and freedom that comes into our lives, knowing that now, because of Christ, nothing can ever separate us from the love of God.

In other words, the grace of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, is the most amazing gift that you and I will ever receive in this lifetime. To live in this state of grace is to know the Kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed. Grace is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, of Christian existence. God is offering that gift of grace right here and right now.

Now, as with all gifts, in order to be truly received, a response is required. A “thank you” is in order. Some might argue that, actually, a true gift requires no response, not unlike “Love Story’s” punch line, “Love is never having to say you’re sorry.” Nonsense. Without thanksgiving, the gifts we receive end up being taken for granted, unappreciated, and in the process, the gift loses its worth all together.

I want share with you one more time one of my favorite stories involving Helen Keller. At one point, Helen, who had been deaf and blind since a very young age,

reacts to a friend's comment that the friend had noticed nothing exceptional during a walk in the woods. Helen responded, " I wondered how it was possible to walk for an hour through the woods and see nothing of note. I who cannot see find hundreds of things: the delicate symmetry of a leaf, the smooth skin of a silver birch, the rough shaggy bark of a pine. I who am blind can give one hint to those who see: use your eyes as if tomorrow you will be stricken blind. Hear the music of voices, the song of a bird, the mighty strains of an orchestra as if you would be stricken deaf tomorrow. Touch each object as if your tactile sense would fail. Smell the perfume of flowers, taste with relish each morsel, as if tomorrow you could never taste or smell again. Glory in the facets and pleasure and beauty which the world reveals to you."

In other words, let us never take for granted the gifts that the Creator has given each one of us. To do so, to take them for granted, dulls our senses, makes us fearful, suspicious, miserly, and angry, imprisons us, and leaves us bereft of grace. God's grace calls for a response and it has everything to do with living lives of thanksgiving. The saints have always known and understood this. Think of Francis of Assisi or Teresa of Avila. Think of the people in your lives who have radiated God's grace. Think of those wonderful moments in your own life when you have experienced that amazing grace of John Newton's hymn. Grace and thanksgiving go hand in hand.

In short, the more we learn to give thanks, the greater our experience of God's grace will be. As one of the great Anglican theologians, William Law, once wrote: "The greatest saint is not the person who prays the most; it is the one who is most thankful." That is something we should all ponder in this All Saints Sunday.

Amen.