

Grace, mercy and peace be to you, my fellow Saints, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

[For All the Saints]

Today is All Saints' Day.

The day that the church historically sets aside
to commemorate and give thanks to God for all those who died in the past year.
“For all the saints, who from their labors rest.”

So we take time honor them in three ways:

Firstly, we give thanks to God for their witness to Him.
Secondly, our own faith is strengthened by their example.
And thirdly, we follow their example in our own lives.

This not only honors those saints who've gone before us, but honors God.

What a wonderful testament it is to God's goodness that he sends his saints!
And not only that he sends his saints, but that he sends them *to us!*
And not only that he sends his saints to us,
but that he sends his saints to us, *in order to teach us to be holy!*
This shows us that God cares.

He does not abandon you to a world full of division, hatred and death.

Instead, he continually seeks to advance you in holiness.

We might put it this way:

‘God loves you just the way that you are,
yet God loves you too much to *leave you* the way that you are.’

That is a message that this world tries so very hard to twist away from us.

This world that is full of division, and hatred, and *death*.

Death is an enemy.

Death was not part of God's plan for Creation.

Death is not ‘natural.’

We are not supposed to be separated from our fellow saints.

And so while we give thanks to God for the witness of His saints,

And while our faith is strengthened by their example,

And while we follow their examples in our own lives...

Today, on All Saints Day, we also *grieve*.

Because they are not with us.

[Hope in the Resurrection of Christ]

The very first Christians grieved too.

It had been almost a full generation since Jesus had died and rose again.
And when Christians looked around, they didn't see new, resurrected life.
They saw their families and friends being martyred for the faith.
Their mothers and children thrown to the lions.
Their fathers beheaded in the public square.
Their pastors were even crucified like their Savior.
For their own safety, Christians had to worship in the catacombs
under the streets, where the Romans buried their dead!
The first Christian altars were the tombs of their friends!
And all but one of the Apostles, John, had been martyred.

Death separated those first Christians from their loved ones.

In response, God gave a dream—a Revelation—to Saint John.

God directed John to write it all down, and we were blessed to hear some of it today.
God directed John to write it all down
because God's saints on earth needed to hear this message.
They needed to hear it over and over and over again:
Those who die with faith in Christ rest in His presence.

John wrote:

*He who sits on the Throne will shelter them with his presence.
They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
the sun shall not strike them,
nor any scorching heat.
For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*

God will wipe away every tear from their eyes...

Death was not the end for Jesus.

Death—even by persecution—will not defeat those who trust in Christ!

[Hope for the World to Come]

We don't face that same type of persecution today.

Not in this country, anyway.

To be sure, our society can be hostile to Christians at times,
but it is generally indifferent to us.

Our biggest concern is when we're going to be allowed to have donuts and coffee again!

We are generally free to worship and live as Christians.

We do not have to hide our Bibles from government censors,

We do not have to fear our churches being bombed,

We do not have to wonder if our families will be separated by violence.

(There are Christians around the world who do face real martyrdom.

In fact, more of our Christian brothers and sisters have been martyred around the world in the last 100 years than in the first 1,900 years of Christian history combined!

Martyrdom may very well come to our land one day too,
and we will have the example of the Saints to follow if it does.
But it is not here, not yet.)

Easy as we may have it, we do share something with those early Christians.

We also grieve.

We grieve the parent who taught us the faith.

We grieve the spouse who prayed with us.

We grieve the friend who worshiped in the pew behind us.

We grieve the unborn child who died before we could hold them.

Death persecutes us in this world.

We, just like those first Christians, need to be reminded:

Those who fall asleep in Christ will rise again with Him!

[Hope for Today]

Yet this hope is for the world to come—where is consolation for the grief we feel *today*?

A moment ago, you heard some familiar words from Matthew's Gospel.

Jesus saw a large crowd following Him,

So he sat down, opened His mouth and began to teach them.

It was the beginning of His famous *Sermon on the Mount*.

You've heard His words before— they're called the "Beatitudes," or "blessings."

In all, eight Beatitudes are given.

In general, each follows a certain formula:

"Blessed is he who ____; for he *will* ____." (Matt. 5:2-12)

There's something different, however, about the first and last Beatitudes.

The formula shifts:

"Blessed are the *poor in spirit*, for theirs *is* the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matt. 5:3)
and...

"Blessed are those who are *persecuted* for righteousness' sake,
for theirs *is* the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matt. 5:10)

For the "*poor in spirit*" and "those who are *persecuted*,"
the Kingdom of Heaven "*is* theirs," *now*. Currently!

Jesus was not speaking merely of a hope for the World to Come,

But of a hope for *today*.

Jesus was talking to us:

We are “*poor in spirit*,” beaten down by the world!
We are “*persecuted*” by death—and sin and the power of the devil!

All Saints’ Day is not just for the saints at rest,
but also for those saints still ‘fighting the good fight’—you and me!
To be a ‘saint’ means simply to be ‘holy.’
In the waters of Baptism, God made *you* holy.
So today is ‘*yours*’ just as much as it is ‘*theirs*.’

And when Jesus says “*theirs* is the Kingdom of Heaven,” He is talking to *you*!

[Yours is the Kingdom; share it!]

You are a saint—a holy one.

You bring the kingdom to others.

You serve your neighbor that they might give thanks to God for your witness to Him.

You serve your neighbor that their faith might be strengthened by your example.

You serve your neighbor that they might follow your example in their own lives.

And you will not do this alone.

In a few moments, we will confess our faith as it’s recorded in the Apostles Creed.

We will say: “I believe in the Communion of Saints.”

The Communion of Saints.

Singular.

We are part of *one* special group ‘set apart by God.’

One group, together, not divided—not even by death.

Did you ever stop to consider the shape of this building.

A semi-circle? It’s not an accident.

The first Christians made the same shape when they worshiped,
hiding in the catacombs among the dead.

Circles are infinite; they have no end.

And this semicircle? It doesn’t stop here.

Even though we cannot see the other half,

the circle continues all the way around the altar

—the open Tomb of our greatest Friend, if you will—

and extends right into heaven.

And at the center of this circle?

The Baptismal font, in which we all were made holy.

May God, who has begun this good work in you at Baptism,

Continue to bring it to completion until the day He calls all his saints to Him.

On that day, we will join with angels, archangels, all the company of heaven,
and the saints who’ve gone before to:

**Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among the people. Amen! (Psalm 96:3)**
