

**ALL SAINTS DAY
October 31, 2021**

**In the name of God, who in Jesus,
taught us the meaning of unconditional Love.
AMEN**

Although today's Gospel reading is about Lazarus, this is also Halloween – or All Hallows Evening -the eve or eventide before All Saints Day. In the Irish understanding of All Hallows Eve – it is a very holy, very special time – because it is understood that it is the time when those who have died before us – those hallowed ones – those saints – seem to be closer to us who are still on our earthly pilgrimage. So, the Irish call this time – thin time or thin space – not a spooky time but rather a very sacred time. A time when our communion with those who have journeyed before us, seem closer, a time when our yearning for continuing communion with those we love but see no more seems relieved, and our soul's sense of holding them close seems more real. This time in the Church calendar is meant as a true gift for us – I would say a far cry from trick or treat/money or eats!

Actually, All Saints Sunday is one of THE 4 biggest days of the Church Year and yet, I think that is often not realized. The other days are Christmas & Easter, of course, and the 4th is Pentecost – the day the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles, and the Church was born.

We have some POWERFUL Scripture readings this morning as we celebrate All Saints Day. If you are a serious Bible reader, I am sure you have had the experience of reading a very familiar passage from the Bible and having one particular part STAND OUT for you, more than the rest, as if you read it for the first time. Even Martin Luther experienced that when he read, as if for the first time, that we are saved by faith, not, by works...and the impact that realization had on him effectively began the Reformation! ///

Well, for me, in studying today's lectionary, a statement from Revelation, came off the page! I read/ we heard, **“See, the home of God is among mortals!”- “See, the home of God is among mortals!”** How much clearer can we hear that God is not in the sky!? God is not somewhere that we can get to if we are good enough. No! The home of God is among mortals! That's us. I do hear this as St. Cyprian's – you – us – as “the home of God among mortals.” God is with us.

That's the meaning of the word Emanuel...which means God is with us, a name for Jesus. Jesus is how we know God. Because, in Jesus, we learn and, ever so slowly perhaps, get it that Jesus lived and died as one of us so that we could know how we too can stay Godly/God focused... as we live our lives.

We are blessed to live so near the ocean and so it is easy for us to picture the ocean in our minds even when we are away from it. Again and again the surf comes up to bathe the shoreline. It never stops. One wave after another. Haven't we all sat at some time just staring at the waves ... fascinated ... hypnotized? And we wonder - really about everything. We wonder what is true. We wonder how long we will be on this Earth. We ponder about how this Earth has been here for longer than we can understand, ... and then perhaps we get a glimpse of the truth that our time here is as a

Visitor so to speak, because what we are looking at...that ocean... will still be here way long after we will not be watching it.

Can we count the waves that bathe the shore in one day's time, or in a year? Let us say that they symbolize the people of the earth...some loud, some soft, some far reaching, others not, some big, some small, some here, some there. Many have been on this earth before us. Before we were born ... before we even began to count, others were born and grew and worked and played and worshipped ... and moved beyond. How many? A multitude that no one can number. But each one a gift to another.

CONSIDER THIS...the waters of Baptism and the sign of the Cross have bathed and marked millions who have preceded us in this, our Christian way of life, and who are now in the Heavenly Realm. Not just the early prophets and those who have been declared saints, but our own, our own dearest loved ones, our family members, our friends ...those whom WE have known and loved and who now are enfolded within the Lord's Love! //// I hope this is a blessed consolation for anyone who grieves.

Think of counting the waves at the shore, counting, counting, counting. /// But then, consider this /// ... as Christians, we need ONLY count to ONE! There is only one God. Surely the love of God is manifested for us to know, in the human person Jesus, who became for us the Holy Messiah, The one chosen and anointed by God Almighty, to live a life so Godly that we, centuries later, are still being called to try to follow. Jesus, who encourages us as we journey here on earth, like the never ending waves that bathe the shore. //// Unceasing and eternal love bathes us in Grace and Peace. What an awesome gift! ///// Though sin and evil abound; though we experience pain and darkness and heartache, we live in the hope, in the confidence, with the promise that, one day, with all the saints of all time, God WILL wipe away all tears from our eyes.

BLESSED are you, says Jesus - or according to some translations, happy are you - when you are poor, mournful, or hungry for a justice you do not see. That's hardly our society's definition of happiness. Who will help us discover the blessing, and who will help us live by kingdom values, if not the communion of saints, the family of faith? We need the communion of saints to remind us that we are blessed when we live as if the love of God were the most important and the most reliable reality in life. We need the community, and the community needs us. With each other's help, we can live the life to which Jesus calls us and //// Praise God We experience this in our life as part of St. Cyprian's.

Did you ever think about the implications of the fact that as human beings, the God in whose image we are created, is known to us in relationship, I mean – think of the Christian image of the Trinity. It's all about relationship – for example: I am my husband's wife, but I am also my mother's daughter – and I am certainly my son and daughter's mother - All relationships! Relationship is at the very heart of the nature of God, and that also says something very important about us. None of us is an island. We are connected in so many ways. We are not made to live only to ourselves. We are made for relationship, both with God and with each other and God's world; and so, we live out our lives in a rather ever-changing web of associations.

It seems to me that we turn toward each other almost instinctively as we celebrate our joys, or we mourn our losses, and we need support through tough times and transitions. We work together to accomplish our goals; we look to each other for reassurance that we are on the right track, or for

guidance if we are not. And, we scarcely ever in adulthood make a decision that does not take somebody else into consideration. /// We look to our parents, grandparents, and mentors for wisdom; we look to our children for zest and inspiration; we look to our friends for help in sorting through the muddle of our daily lives. //// None of us is an island, and thank God for that. /// For all of us who have found St. Cyprian's to be that place of safe caring and sharing, I praise God. And for me, forever, St. Cyprian's will remain the place where I have thanked God for inspiring me to BE ... yes, to just Be...to trust that who I am /// what I am, always if offered simply, would be MY hand in the hand of My Lord.

On the first of November every year, we in the Christian Church, remember that we are not islands, and give thanks for that in the celebration known as All Saints. And what is a saint? //// Well, there are those who have been especially recognized for some specific work and have days named for them. But, mostly we don't recognize saints in that sense. We have a more generalized vision of a saint as someone who is loving, forgiving, always looking out for the needs of others. Someone who knows what God wants them to do and strives to do it.

There are other ways of describing saints. Paul's letters to the early churches often began with greetings to "those called to be saints." And don't miss it: Those greetings were addressed to the entire congregation! The word Saint, in fact, simply means "holy" says a favorite theologian, Frederick Buechner. He says, "A saint is a life giver. A saint is a human being with the same sorts of hang-ups and abysses as the rest of us, but if a saint touches your life, you become alive in a new way." We certainly know we have some saints among us today. This is kind of like the definition you may have heard, given by a child who had been told that the figures in stained glass windows were saints. To which the little girl said, "Oh, a saint is someone the light shines through."

Well, with that definition in mind, I am thinking of the hymn we will sing later called "I sing a song of the saints of God" and it says, ... "God's Love made them strong...and they followed the right the whole of their good lives long...!!" I don't mean that we are actually Saints in the sense that we are elevated to some perfect holiness, but, I DO mean that - in the way each of us is called by God to follow the ways of Jesus, of goodness and love, by caring for the others among us, we do have Saints among us!! And praise God, that their faithfulness will continue to draw us to be more self-less and more faithfilled in being mindful of the needs of others.

All Saints Sunday celebrates the numbers upon numbers who have been, and some who are, following the commandments of Love and Forgiveness, of loving God with our whole hearts and our neighbors as ourselves... Hear that because that is YOU, this congregation of St. Cyprian's enfolded in God's Love forever. God's OWN forever. PRAISE GOD! You share that love in God's world, some ever so quietly, some with making a significant gift of caring and love to ease the way for another.

All Saints Sunday celebrates those who have been among us following God's Love, made known to them in Jesus, of loving God ALWAYS FIRST with their whole hearts, of being enfolded in God's Love forever. WE are God's FOREVER. What a Blessed Assurance we have!

And – the more we love our neighbor as ourselves, the more we say Thank You Lord that we are enfolded in your Love Forever.

AMEN