

On this All Saints Sunday, hear the word of God as found in Ecclesiasticus, chapter 44 (1-14):

Let us now sing the praises of famous men,
our ancestors in their generations.
² The Lord apportioned to them great glory,
his majesty from the beginning.
³ There were those who ruled in their kingdoms,
and made a name for themselves by their valor;
those who gave counsel because they were intelligent;
those who spoke in prophetic oracles;
⁴ those who led the people by their counsels
and by their knowledge of the people's lore;
they were wise in their words of instruction;
⁵ those who composed musical tunes,
or put verses in writing;
⁶ rich men endowed with resources,
living peacefully in their homes—
⁷ all these were honored in their generations,
and were the pride of their times.
⁸ Some of them have left behind a name,
so that others declare their praise.
⁹ But of others there is no memory;
they have perished as though they had never existed;
they have become as though they had never been born,
they and their children after them.
¹⁰ But these also were godly men,
whose righteous deeds have not been forgotten;
¹³ Their offspring will continue forever,
and their glory will never be blotted out.
¹⁴ Their bodies are buried in peace,
but their name lives on generation after generation.

At the beginning of our service today we read the names you requested to be read as one measure to remember our loved ones who have preceded us in death. We do this, in part, because Sirach, the author of Ecclesiasticus, tells us that “some of them have left behind a name so that others declare their praise.” Among our prayers is a plea that we, the living, may always be supported by their witness to the Lord's power and glory.

Debie Thomas writes:

This week, Christians around the world celebrate All Souls and All Saints. In a world that fears, cheapens, and desecrates death, the Church invites God's people to linger at the grave in grief, remembrance, gratitude, and hope. In a world that mistreats and abuses countless men, women, and children, the Church affirms the value of every single soul, every single life. In a world that privileges the individual, the Church honors the deep interconnectedness of God's family across time, culture, history, and eternity. Yes,

it's true: in the midst of life, we are in death. But All Souls and All Saints remind us of a deeper truth: in the midst of death, we are promised life.¹

We remain grounded in our faith in order to move into the world with strength and courage. We recite the prayers and the Creed as one means of taking deep into ourselves the values of our faith.

Next Sunday we will baptize Estelle Cohn Rossman, daughter of Emma and Zach Rossman, granddaughter of Mike and Meegan Reidy. A time of celebration of this new life who brings such joy. As part of our service, we recite The Baptismal Covenant, which includes the following:

Celebrant Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

People I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. (BCP 304)

We believe in the communion of saints – saints being all those who are part of God's household. All those who stand in witness to God's love to a broken and hurting world. The living and the dead. All those who profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And, as the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews put it so eloquently: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith ..." (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Leo Joseph, priest-in-charge at St. John's, Lakeport, writes about the importance of All Saints:

One of the important functions of religion is building and maintaining "Holy Community," which is a concept that is severely threatened in our modern world. This has been done in the Judeo-Christian tradition by "remembering," not nostalgic "looking back," but by "making present" the greatness of God's goodness and love in our lives today. This is done by means of story and ritual, as our Jewish friends do principally at Passover and we Christians do at Easter and, indeed, every Sunday in our celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

These celebrations are also tied to the natural cycle of the year as we experience them in the Northern Hemisphere. Just as Passover and Easter reflect the phenomenon of rebirth in spring, autumn naturally turns our thoughts to death and eternity. As the days shorten and the growing darkness overcomes us, our common ancestors marked this season with various rituals centered around fire, food gathered at the harvest, and being conscious of

¹ <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay> (October 30, 2018)

those who had gone before us. So this season of year is a natural time for the Church to remember her, and our, loved ones who made us who we are today. ...

There is a Mexican saying that we die three deaths: the first is when our bodies die, the second is when our bodies are lowered into the earth out of sight, and the third is when our loved ones forget us. Christians forestall that last death by seeing the faithful dead as members of the Church, alive in Christ, and by praying for them and asking their prayers for us.²

So, let us close this time of reflection with prayer – found in our Book of Common Prayer, #4, page 838:

Almighty and everlasting God, we yield unto thee most high Praise and hearty thanks for the wonderful grace and virtue declared in all thy saints, who have been the chosen vessels of thy grace, and the lights of the world in their several generations: for Abraham, the father of believers, and Sarah his wife; for Moses the lawgiver, and Aaron the priest; for Miriam and Joshua, Deborah and Gideon, and Samuel with Hannah his mother, and for all the holy patriarchs; for Isaiah and all the prophets; for the Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God; for Peter and Paul and all the apostles; for Mary and Martha, and Mary Magdalene; for Stephen, the first martyr, and for all the martyrs; and for all other thy righteous servants, known to us and unknown; and we beseech thee that, rejoicing in their fellowship, encouraged by their examples, and aided by their prayers, we also may run with steadfastness the race that is set before us, and finish our course in faith; and that at the day of the general resurrection, we, with all those who are of the mystical body of thy Son, may be set on his right hand, and hear that his most joyful voice: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Grant this, O Father, for the sake of the same thy Son Jesus Christ, our only Mediator and Advocate. Amen.

² <http://www.norcalepiscopal.org/celebrating-all-saints-and-all-souls-day> (October 27, 2018)