

All Saints'/All Souls' 2020: St Paul's Cathedral Sale

Rev 7:9-17; 1 Jn 3:1-3; Matt 5:1-12

What a joy to see your faces here this morning, as we welcome many more who are with us online.

Smiling faces, too; and we are glad to be able to gather inside our beloved Cathedral once again, and in churches right around the Diocese – albeit in small numbers for now, and very mindful of the protocols that help keep us and others safe.

Thank you for your patience, and your perseverance; for your braving of the Gippsland Spring weather in order to worship outdoors these last few weeks; and for your hunger to return to our fellowship at this table, where the One who is Guest and Host feeds us for our shared journey.

Yes, we can pray and read and reflect at home; yes we can join with others online, as we have been; yet worship is an essentially public and corporate act, and never a private one, even though it may be intensely personal.

We're reminded of this as we start to come back together by the feast day we anticipate on Sunday: All Saints; that great cloud of witnesses, with whose prayers our own are always united, as that first reading from the Book of Revelation captures with its imagery of those who worship in God's nearer presence.

It is one of the days in the Church's calendar that speaks to popular culture.

I'm not so sure how Trick or Treating is going to work under COVID restrictions, and our two children's sugar cravings won't be easily satisfied on zoom; however, a trip to the supermarket suggests that Halloween will be observed in many households this year nonetheless.

Hallow E'en is derived from All Hallows' Eve, the night before All Hallows' Day or, as we know it, All Saints' Day. And in some Latin American and European cultures the festivities resonate also with All Souls' Day, which the Church observes the day after All Saints' Day, in terms of a heightened remembrance of those who have gone before us.

All Saints' and All Souls' days this year will be especially poignant for so many; for a number of you here today, perhaps, or joining us online.

Our clergy have been taking funeral services for bereaved families unable to gather freely and tend reverently to those who have died during the pandemic.

Our people have suffered loss compounded by distance and travel restrictions, with little or no opportunity to ritualise their grief, or to tell and hear those precious stories in the company of others over table fellowship.

All the more important then, that this feast day will not allow us to forget the radical holiness embodied by the saints, or the faith, hope and love shared with us by the champions of our own lives.

Our remembering of them in this household, where the water of baptism is thicker than blood, is by way of telling the one story which is both theirs and ours; a story that begins: 'On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread...'

And so we break bread together today, with grateful hearts for this privilege that we must never take for granted.

For companions – literally those with whom we break bread – we have each other, of course; but let us also be conscious of the whole body of Christ – the church catholic or universal which is always in some sense present at the Lord's table, along with all the company of those whose lives – and in some cases deaths – have born witness to the one Jesus called 'Father,' whose kingdom belongs to the poor in spirit, wherein the meek inherit the earth, and whose blessed children are peace-makers; not to be confused with 'cheese makers', even in Gippsland!

Inspired by their stories, may we better understand our own: living more fully into, and out of, the great story that we share with the saints and all the faithful departed.

And may that peaceable, borderless kingdom – the just, merciful, and gentle rule of God – grow in us and through us, as we serve our brothers and sisters in the church and in the world God so loves.

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