

Sermon November 6, 2022

All Saints

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. Hebrews 12:1

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today we celebrate All Saints' Day. There is no need for a high and lofty sermon on occasions such as this because the intent of All Saints' Day supplies enough energy on its own to sufficiently light up and power the observance. It is simple. Today is about those of the faith who have gone before us and are with God in heaven. We remember them. We give God thanks for them. We let them inspire us towards greater glory. Some are famous. Some we love. There are others we have never heard of. Just the same, they are all God's holy ones in Christ and together combine to make up the *All Saints* who we recall and celebrate on this special day.

Being creatures of time and space, it is natural – if not necessary – for us to look back from time to time and recall important events and people. It's part of being human.

As I traverse the busy halls of the various hospitals I visit, I view the portraits of men and women who for that particular institution were notable leaders, volunteers, or donors. Many of our churches have pictures of all the pastors who were shepherds of that flock or at least a plaque with all their names and the dates they served. Schools have trophy cases of past accomplishments, engraved lists of principals and teachers, and photos of classes and teams of yesteryear. The Bible gives us our list of great people. We have the family of Noah who endured

the great Flood. Abraham and Sarah are remembered as the ones through whom the Lord started the family line of the Messiah. There's Miriam, Moses, and Aaron who led Israel through the Exodus and wilderness years. Joshua, Gideon, Samson, King David, Josiah, Elijah, and the prophets led God's people in later years. In the New Testament we learn about Mary and Joseph, Simeon, John the Baptist, Peter, James, John, and Paul. In the church we have our own heroes of the faith: Athanasius; Augustine; Gregory, John Chrysostom; Luther and the reformers. They are highlights of all those who are all the saints.

Our towns, villages, and boroughs are adorned with monuments featuring the names of those who served in our wars. These are lasting shrines, so the names are etched in stone. These men and women did not give fortunes of money and do not have their names on medical wings or university halls. They did not rise to the top leadership. Some did give something more valuable than anything else. They gave it for their country. They gave their lives. There is nothing greater, there is nothing more that one can give. Therefore, we understand the importance of remembering these heroes. In the church we remember those who gave their lives for the Name. We call them martyrs. The word martyr means "witness." They gave witness to the importance of their faith. Jesus says if we are faithful unto death, we will receive a crown of life. Martyrs have this in spades. Most of God's prophets died as martyrs. All the apostles except John were executed for their testimony. We know of missionaries who were killed by unaccepting peoples. So many have yielded their lives rather than their faith and as martyrs for God have been added to the number of All Saints.

About an hour and a half's drive down highway 30 is the United Airlines Flight 93 memorial. You can see the place where the plane went into the ground. You can listen to some of the last transmissions of those who were lost in the crash. You can view the manifest of passengers and see which row and seat they were each assigned. And the facility

contains all kinds of information surrounding that day and what led up to the national tragedy that caught us unawares. We now know that plans to attack our country had been laid long before September 11, 2001.

We also know from the Gospel writers in the Bible that plans had been brewing for some time in the covert conversations of religious leaders to get rid of Jesus. It took the people – even the disciples – unawares. It was the opposite of what they had in mind when Jesus – their one great hope for the rise of Israel back to greatness - was nailed to the cross and died.

We have names and pictures of the important in the halls. We have memorialized the brave in monuments. The historic annals of our heroes are recorded in books. Yet the greatest repositories of those who have gone before are in our graveyards. With a countless number of the dead, each tomb is permanently marked with a name and dates. Except one. Jesus' grave has no marker because that sepulcher could not hold him. In Jesus' cross is found the forgiveness of our sins. Therefore, Jesus also holds power over death and the grave. In his resurrection we have the promise of life eternal with the Lord and all who belong to him. In his resurrection, Jesus emptied his tomb so that we will one day empty ours. We distinguish the graves of believers with crosses, signifying they are washed in the blood of the Lamb and their bodies await his final appearing. Jesus makes all those who turn to him in faith his saints.

On days like All Saints' Day, we usually think of it in a way that there are many of us here below and each of us have a few we remember who have passed on. However, it is the opposite. The far greater number are those in heaven with the Lord. All those of faith from the beginning are with him who is the resurrection and life. Who can count that number? It is sure to far exceed the number of us here below. We are the vast

minority! It is no small thing then when we say in those words during communion that it is not just us here at 400 Barclay who give thanks to the Lord and magnify his name. Rather, we praise God in the presence of angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven. That's All Saints. When we come to the table, we are in the presence of Jesus. Where Jesus is, there is heaven. This includes all the ranks of angels and all God's people living and departed. This is a vast number of holy beings! If this does not inspire us to keep our faces turned toward the Lord and make his power a reality in our lives, what will?

So we remember, observe, and celebrate All Saints' Day. It means the great heroes of times past. It means those who gave their lives for the Name. It's grandpa, grandma, mom, dad, brother, sister, son, daughter, spouse, family and friends. By the power of God they were all faithful unto death. If God saw them through to the end, he will see us through as well. That is our certainty. That is our trust. That is our confidence. That is All Saints'. Thanks be to God! Amen.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in him. Amen.

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