

Parish of Central Exeter

Night Prayer

All Saints Day 1 November
All Souls Day 2 November
2020

As for us, we have this great crowd of witnesses around us.
{*Hebrews 12.1*}

The Church uses these two days to remind us of our communal connection with those who have gone before us.

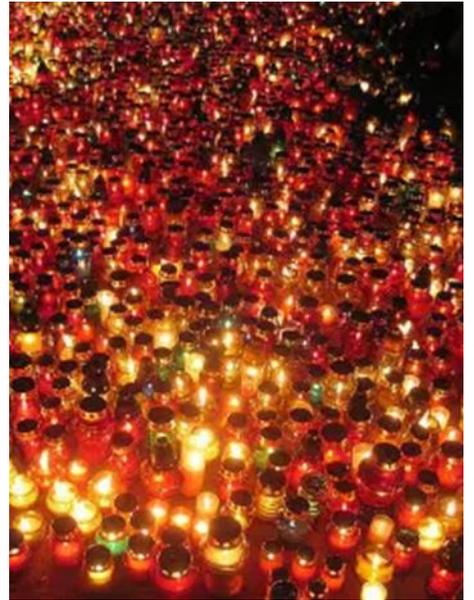
Before Christianity came to these islands this time of year was Samhain, which marked the end of the old year and start of the new. This was a time of looking back to the blessings of the summer, and ensuring that all had been harvested and properly stored. It was also a time of preparation for the winter months with animals that were not winter hardy to be brought inside, and those that could not be housed, slaughtered and preserved. Anything that could not be kept was eaten in a time of feasting.

This time of moving between years meant that the barrier between the concrete and the spiritual worlds was stretched and thin. Looking back over the year that had passed led to remembering those who had died, to whom you might feel closer at this time. But the coming period of dark and cold days also meant that evil spirits might slip through the thin boundary, and so you needed to protect yourself against them.

These beliefs were not eradicated by the coming of Christianity, but remained a strong folk memory, so that the Celtic church found it easy to associate All Saints Day and All Souls Day with this period.

Rather than try and discuss the theological difference between being a Saint or a Soul, it might be easier to think in terms of those who have gone before us who have influenced us (saints and spiritual guides) and those of your blood (your ancestors and loved ones).

However, this is not just a time of looking back but also of looking forward. This service is shaped so that it moves us through meditation, music, poetry and prayer from the past through the present into the future.



A time of looking back

Preparation

We begin in our world of changing seasons. You might like to imagine yourself on an island like Lindisfarne or Iona. A different time and space.

Saints of days long gone
standing on seashore and mountain top
considered the might of the elements
that you had created:
the roar of the wind and waves
the constancy of the tides and seasons.

To them, Lord it was evidence enough
that your creative Spirit was still empowering
this fragile world, encircling their lives
as the very wind and mist
that swirled around them.

We have so little time
to contemplate this world
and complain when wind and rain
conspire to spoil our day.

Yet in doing so we often fail
to gain the comfort
and reassurance
that your saints felt in their isolation.

We forget that it was your creative breath
that set this universe in motion
and still moves across the world.
Not always predictably
but there to be seen and felt,
there to offer the comfort and reassurance
of a God who is constant and eternal.

Thank you, Creator God
for the constancy and ample evidence
of your love for this world.

(John Birch, posted on Faith and Worship - Prayers and Resources)



Opening hymn

For all the Saints: sung for us (triumphantly!) by the Royal School of Church Music Millennium Youth Choir, in Chester Cathedral. The words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOCOMb--FWY&t=3s>



Prayer for Forgiveness

If we have placed our only hope
in the things we can see and touch,
and have denied to ourselves, or those close to us,
that greater hope in the glory of things unseen....
Lord have mercy.

If we have chosen to nurse our grief
for the loss of dear ones
with the bitterness of those who weep
without hope or faith in your saving love....
Christ have mercy.

If we put the saints on pious pedestals,
and restrict ourselves to a diminished respect
for our own capacity to grow in the knowledge and love of God...
Lord have mercy.

(written by Bruce Prewer)

Words of Assurance

God of love,
you have given us your word;
In you there is no darkness
and the light of Christ Jesus
is with us always.

Thanks be to God!

Collect

Great God of bounty and provider in lean times,
protector from evil and hope of new light and life,
we thank you for all those who before us
have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and walked in His ways.

We praise you that with them
we are part of the fellowship of all saints, past and present.
Teach us to follow their examples of faithfulness and service,
and to trust You through all the dark, cold days
to bring us through to light and new life.
In the name of the One who transforms all life,
Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

Lord we remember

Lord, we remember before you
all those people who have worshipped
in our parish over the centuries.
Some are commemorated
in monuments on the walls,
some through stone ledgers in the floor,
but most have left no trace
of having been part of our community,
and yet they are an invisible presence,
part of our heritage.

We remember before you
those who are known to us
as members of our communities
who have died and entered into your glory

We bless you for their life and love,
and rejoice that for them "all is well,
and all manner of things will be well." Amen.



In the present

The Lord's prayer

(This is the opening part of a long Lord's Prayer written for the Covid pandemic by Jim Wallis on the Sojourners website.)

Our Father, we feel stuck
in the middle of events we have little control over.
Help us to believe that our present
does not control our future,
that we can look forward
and not just backward.

Enable us to change our situation now
by bringing the future into it.
Only the radical values of your new order
— of love and justice —
will bring your kingdom into our community right now,
lived in this and all moments.

Inspire and sustain us
to bring your kingdom to earth
even right now — in this moment of crisis.

Worship Song

Nigel and friends in St David's virtual Choir sing the Taize chant: 'In the Lord be ever thankful'.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9XLM7tA2Nxg>

In the Lord I'll be ever thankful,
In the Lord I'll rejoice.
Look to God, do not be afraid,
Lift up your voices, the Lord is near;
Lift up your voices the Lord is near.

The lesser saints?

We often think of the saints as some great figures of the past, whose life stories we often have to take with a pinch of salt (or more!). The following two passages help to give us a different focus.

The Quiet Saints

Thank you, Father
for the selfless giving of time.
For those often quiet saints
who do not argue their theology loudly,
engage in lengthy debates
over complex doctrinal issues,
or make their presence felt
within the hallowed space
of Church Council meetings,
but simply get on with doing
the business;
visiting the sick, the aged
and the lonely;
a shoulder to cry on,
a listening ear,
and the reassurance
of one who cares.



Thank you, Father
for all those quiet saints
who live their faith through their lives
in a world that often forgets
that you were never too busy to listen,
never too busy to minister to needs,,
never too engrossed in work
to bring hope and wholeness into lives.
Thank you, Father,
for your quiet saints.

(John Birch, posted on Faith and Worship - Prayers and Resources)

'All Saints Day' *(This is part of a longer poem)*

All Saints Day
The holiday arrives
quietly like phrases
of faint praise
in Braille. Famous
saints bow at the waist,
then step back, making
room for scores
of unknown saints,
to whom this day
also belongs. Not

a glamorous bunch,
these uncanonized,
unsung ones, shading
their eyes shyly
in the backs of the minds
of the few who knew them.
Hung-over, mute, confused,
hunched, clumsy, blue,
pinched, rigid or fidgety,
unable to look the radioactive,
well-dressed major saints
in the eye, they wonder
terrified: What (the hell)
Am I Doing Here?

Amy Gerstler Posted by The Best American Poetry

Affirmation of commitment

Saints and sinners
We souls are a cloth of diverse colours
made from many gifts and graces.
We are the people flowing forth from Creator God,
surprising ourselves with the things which can be done.

We are raw material for rewarding relationships as our lives interweave,
contributing one to the other,
holding each other firm when one is weak or breaking.

We are each worthy of being respected and cared for
essential to the pattern,
skilled in our appointed tasks,
sources of laughter and sharers of tears.

We commit ourselves to work together,
that one day, this world may be a place
where all people live in justice, freedom and peace.
(Posted on the Rex A. E. Hunt website.)

Prayer for Others

Holy One, Creator of all
To You, we give thanks
For every blessing, for You
Are generous, O lover of souls.

May we be filled with gratitude
For every gift of life,
For family, friends,
And the Saints who have gone before us.

From those who are peacemakers,
May we learn, and follow their example
From those who are pure in heart
May we become likewise, Christ-like.

Holy One, Creator of all
To You, we give thanks
For every blessing, for You
Are generous, O lover of souls.

For those who suffer, we ask for comfort
For those who are ill, we ask for healing
For those who struggle, we ask for peace
For those who worry, we ask for guidance
For those who are anxious, we ask for solace
For those who are hungry, may we give food
For those who are homeless, may we provide shelter
For those who are poor, may we bring sustenance
For all the worries and cares of this earth,
May we be your heart and hands
May we be generous as You.

Holy One, Creator of all
To You we give thanks for every blessing,
for You are generous, O lover of all.
God of every nation, tribe, people, and language,
God of all creation, this great multitude of life
We give you thanks.

Bless us, that we may be a blessing in return.
Amen

(posted by Terri on RevGalBlogPals)



Looking to the future

New Testament Readings

I John 3:1-3 New revised Standard Version

³ ¹ See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. ³ And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Revelation 7: 9-11

The Great Multitude in White Robes

⁹ After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

¹¹ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: "Amen!

Praise and glory
and wisdom and thanks and honour
and power and strength
be to our God for ever and ever.
Amen!"



All Saints by Malcolm Guite

Malcolm weaves past, present and future together in this poem.

Though Satan breaks our dark glass into shards
Each shard still shines with Christ's reflected light,
It glances from the eyes, kindles the words
Of all his unknown saints. The dark is bright
With quiet lives and steady lights undimmed,
The witness of the ones we shunned and shamed.
Plain in our sight and far beyond our seeing
He weaves them with us in the web of being
They stand beside us even as we grieve,

The lone and left behind whom no one claimed,
Unnumbered multitudes, he lifts above
The shadow of the gibbet and the grave,
To triumph where all saints are known and named;
The gathered glories of His wounded love.

Commission and Blessing

Go on your way rejoicing;
Surrounded as you are by such a great cloud of witnesses,
take courage as you face each new challenge,
and comfort when you pick yourself from a fall,
In whatever good you choose to do,
precede it with hope,
accompany it with prayer,
and follow it with thanksgiving.

The blessing of God Most Wonderful,
whom the saints have trusted as
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
will be with you
now and ever more. *Amen!*

(Bruce Prewer, on Bruce Prewer's Homepage.)

Closing music

*Well there could only be one choice for the closing music: When the Saints go Marching in.
Played and sung for us here by the maestro himself, Louis Armstrong. Enjoy!*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZzcmX1yR74>

