

All Saints Day Year A 2020

November 1, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Today is All Saints Day, the day in which we remember all the faithful, both living and those who have died, and we profess that we are somehow bound together with them across space and time through the power of our God who loves us.

As a congregation, we take time each year to remember those close to us who have died. But, this year, our commemoration is a bit more somber, as we remember not only our own loved ones, but also the 230,000 Americans, and 1.2 million individuals worldwide who have died of COVID-19. Many of the families of these individuals as well as the families of others who have died this year have not had the opportunity to gather with friends and family and grieve the death of their loved ones as they normally would. We’ve seen this in our own congregation as some of our members have died, and have not been able to safely gather with everyone at a funeral service.

Jesus promises that those who mourn will be comforted, but there has been little comfort to go around these past few months. We have not had the opportunity to safely be among those that we love, give a hug, share a meal together, or comfort one another in our grief. Our grief has been compounded by loneliness and longing in this time of isolation, and the stress of COVID-19 itself intensifies our grief.

So where do we find comfort when our normal outlets—of gatherings, meals, and hugs—are not safe? Certainly, there are those who have turned to alcohol, drugs or other indulgent behaviors during this time in order to find comfort. But I imagine that these activities don’t provide comfort so much as they provide a brief escape from reality or a way to briefly dull the pain. Instead, true comfort comes from God, it comes from the good news of the Gospel, and it comes from the communion of saints.

Jesus tells us, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” In other years, perhaps we’ve felt a bit distant from these words, perhaps even a bit distant from our grief. Certainly, we all experience grief at different times due to different circumstances, but this year, the grief feels more communal or widespread. It is more palpable within our community and world. And so, in other years, when we might have heard these words from Jesus and felt as though he was speaking about someone else, perhaps it is easier to feel this year that this blessing is meant for us. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Jesus promises blessing and comfort for each of us. We are blessed, and beloved, and comforted by God always, but especially in this time when we mourn.

On this All Saints Day, we are also reminded that we are not alone. We are gathered with all the people of God, across all time and space, throughout all of history and into the future. We didn’t read it this morning, but in Hebrews 12, we recall that we are surrounded by the communion of saints. We hear, “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.” We are not alone in our grief. Within the communion of saints—the great cloud of witnesses—there are others that share our pain, that grieve with us, and that have found the strength to carry on. The people in our community and world know the weight that the coronavirus bears on our lives. People throughout history have known similar situations to our

own. Our grief is shared by those around us and by those throughout time and space who have struggled as we have, or who can empathize with our pain. The communion of saints gives us strength, cheers us on, and empowers us to persevere through our grief.

And even when we feel absolutely alone, God promises to be with us and to bring us comfort and peace. When we gather for communion, God joins us together with the communion of saints, and we catch a glimpse of that great feast that is to come. We are reunited with our loved ones through the meal that we share at the table. And we hope for the day when God will gather us all together again in God's kingdom. God provides comfort and peace through the sacraments, but God will provide eternal comfort and peace in heaven. In Revelation we hear God's promise that when we are all gathered in the fullness of time, we will "hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike...nor any scorching heat...The Lamb at the center of the throne will be [our] shepherd, and will guide [us] to the springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes."

And so, on this All Saints Day, even as we mourn, even as we grieve those who have died, we give thanks to God. God promises that we are blessed. God promises that we are surrounded by the communion of saints, and we not alone. And God promises that we will have eternal comfort and peace. Thanks be to God. Amen.