

Sunday 3 November 2024

All Saints'



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The Collect for All Saints'

Almighty God,
you have knit together your elect
in one communion and fellowship
in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord:
grant us grace so to follow your blessed saints
in all virtuous and godly living
that we may come to those inexpressible joys
that you have prepared for those who truly love you;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear.
And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;
he will swallow up death for ever.
Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the Lord has spoken.
It will be said on that day,
Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.
This is the Lord for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. *Isaiah 25:6-9*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from the Revelation of St John the Divine

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

‘See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.’

And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ Then he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

Revelation 21:1-6a

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

All Glory to you O Lord.

When Mary came where Jesus was, and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him!’ But some of them said, ‘Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?’

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

John 11:32-44

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

Our Great High Priest and his Complete Salvation

Today we will have a look at our reading from Hebrews Chapter 9. Hebrews is one of those carefully argued discussions rich in insight into Jesus and his work. One of my favourites.

The problem addressed

The letter is written to address a very specific concern. There are believers in Jesus from a Jewish background who are being tempted to return to their Jewish life and practices, which is very understandable when we realise that Jewish practise touches every corner of life and are rooted in family life. It is tough then, to counter the draw of a whole life pattern, for we develop ruts: patterns of emotional reaction that we automatically slip into and which are not easy to escape. Those of us who have biked on rough country paths know how those ruts affect us. The echo through the letter is that "Jesus is better". We need to establish new ruts of thinking and emotion based on that.

What is 'better' in our passage?

Jesus is a better, a greater High Priest than found in Jewish practice. This tells us this letter is written very early in the church's existence, since the temple practices being talked about came to an end with the destruction of the Temple

in the first Jewish rebellion, about 70 AD. The claim made by our writer here is extraordinary. The Temple and its practices are all very well, he says, but what they achieve can only ever be a temporary success. So they have to be repeated time and again, year after year. But in addition, it is spoken of as being merely a copy, a shadow, of a heavenly reality. So, turning to Jesus, we are shown how he surpasses all these earthly practices. He saves **once for all**. His sacrifice is done and dusted, a done deal, completed. We need add nothing to it. Saved to the uttermost.

What of our problem with 'ruts'?

Today is All Saints. Some news for you if you hadn't realised it: the New Testament describes all followers of Jesus as saints, which means today we celebrate us! The trouble with the traditional picture of saints as heroes, exemplars of holiness and purity, is that we feel we can't compete and that we aren't able to achieve that. And that sets us up to slip into some of the usual ruts that we common or garden Christians are so prone to.

We hold on to guilt. We look back at all our failures and find ourselves in the mire. Down into the rut we go! We're looking in the wrong direction. Some good news for you: Jesus knows you to the deepest darkest secret and went into suffering that he might save you. Look to him and his love not yourself and your failures. Then there's the related poor old me rut: I don't deserve it. I've known people to react to this one in different ways. One way is to invest a lot of effort in trying to get holier, which of course generates negatives when we fail. The other one is to give up in the wrong way and just go through the motions of religion. In both cases the symptom seen in lives is a loss of real joy. We've got our eyes again on ourselves and lost sight of the smile on Jesus' face and lost touch with the gift of the Spirit that brings life.

Our great high priest has saved us to the uttermost. Let us come again to him today and accept with gratitude his free gift (note the free, we don't have to earn it, just accept it!). And may the peace of God rest on us, and may we be surprised by joy!