

All Saints', Isaiah 25:6-9, Revelation 21:1-6a, John 11:32-44

At this time each year we celebrate **All Saints**, and often think of loved ones, saints, who have gone before us. **Three aspects** of what it means to be a saint:

1. Saints are those called by Jesus to follow him.

In the New Testament a saint is another name for a Christian. So, we are all saints. They are not just people who feature in stained glass windows or are commemorated in the Church's calendar, or famous for holy lives and mighty acts. All Christian people are saints. Today is an opportunity to recall and remember those saints who have helped us along our lives' journey, who have encouraged us, accompanied us through life's trials, who have taught us by their lives, who have been a light for us. Maybe people we have never met, but read about, and felt inspired by them to live for Christ. Maybe those we have known well and lived alongside. So, let us give thanks for those saints today.

2. We belong to a vast community of saints

The community of saints stretches back in time and forward in time, it includes people from every age who have followed Jesus. Christians are always called to live in community, not all like monks and nuns who share vows and lives together, but to live as part of a group of people who belong to God, the Church. We are each called by Jesus to follow him, but we are not called alone. This brings responsibilities, to play our part in the life of the Church. And it brings privileges, of the love and support of others, as we help one another to follow Jesus. This can be an encouragement to us, that we are never alone. Not only is God always with us, but we have brothers and sisters in Christ who are there with us as well.

3. Our destiny is to be together with God eternally.

Isaiah pictures this as a banquet with God. *Is 25:6-8a. '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. A joyous gathering where no one will die, and no one will cry anymore.'* This lovely picture is echoed at the very end of the Bible in Rev 21:3-4. *'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.'*

Jesus often spoke about the banquet we will enjoy with him and all the saints in heaven, a great and joyful gathering of God's people. This is our **eternal destiny**, the fulfilment of all God's work in Christ. I believe it is something wonderful to look forward to.

In our gospel reading we see these **three aspects illustrated**:

Lazarus, Martha and Mary, were brother and sisters living just outside Jerusalem, in Bethany, who **had been called to follow Jesus**, and become his friends. Jesus stayed with them whenever he went up to Jerusalem. They were **part of the community** of those who loved and followed Jesus. They are a model and example for us, of saints. They offered Jesus hospitality and waited upon him when he came to stay, they listened attentively to him and loved him.

You know the story, Lazarus fell ill, and his sisters sent a message to Jesus to come quickly. The other disciples try to deter Jesus from going to Jerusalem, because they know danger awaits him. Jesus knows that he must go and die in Jerusalem, but first he will raise Lazarus to life again.

John 11:23-27a. *'Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'*

Jesus tells Martha that Lazarus would rise to life again, but she had no understanding of resurrection life... it had never happened before! But as a saint, Martha knew Jesus, loved her and her brother, and trusted him to do what was right and necessary.

v33-35 *'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.'*

Jesus went to the grave with the sisters. As they cried, so Jesus also was moved by compassion for them and wept by the graveside. Death and tears are part of being human, but Jesus is revealing a new and better life, where there will be no more death or tears.

v41b, 43-44a. *'And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard 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.'*

Jesus prayed, and Lazarus was raised. Jesus demonstrates that he spoke the truth when he spoke of life that defies death. Jesus is showing everyone in this powerful miracle that the destiny of all who follow him is eternal life with him for ever, where death is no more, and tears are no more.

So let us thank God that we have been called to follow Jesus in the community of all the saints, and rejoice in our eternal destiny as saints of God.