

All Saints Day

Preached: 11/1/2020 – Germantown;

Welcome:

Welcome to Germantown Church of God. I am Pastor Mark Hosler. I want to thank you for joining me today for this time of Worship, Prayer and the Study of Scripture. I appreciate you taking time for worship.

On the Church Calendar, this Sunday is known as All Saints Day. It is a day when we remember and honor Saints of all the ages – in the distant past and recently. It is a day that we are reminded that God is redeeming people from sin and evil and forming a community of people to live with Him and serve Him throughout eternity. We who are believers in Jesus are a part of that Community of faith. We give thanks to God today for coming into the world in the person of Jesus and saving us for Himself.

Scripture

Hebrews 11:39 – 12:3

Message

The Influence of the Saints

It is always nice to be honored and appreciated by others. But it is also a good feeling to honor someone else who has had an impact on our lives. For some people that is better than being honored yourself.

On the Church Calendar this Sunday, November 1 is All Saints Day. In the early days of the Church there were many martyrs who had been persecuted and put to death for their faith. The Church desired to honor each of them for their witness. A day was designated to honor each of the martyrs. But as time went on, there were so many martyrs that not everyone could be recognized with a special day. So one day was designated to recognize and honor those who had given their lives for the faith. Originally the day was observed in May. But Pope Gregory III changed the observance to November 1.

As is true of many of the special seasons and days on the Church Calendar, not all Christians or Churches observe All Saints Day. But it can be an important day in the life of the Church. John Wesley who began the movement that became Methodism considered it one of the great celebrations of the Church. He wrote: ***“How superstitious are they who scruple giving God solemn thanks for the lives and deaths of his saints!”*** He believed it was appropriate to honor Saints of the past who have handed down to us an example to follow.

I want to talk for a few minutes today about why this Holiday is significant. The text that I read from Hebrews helps us to understand why it is important to be reminded of the witness of others.

To understand the day, we must first understand the meaning of the word **Saint**. Many people have the mistaken notion that a Saint is someone who has been designated to be a Saint by a group of Church leaders. They are recognized for their deep spirituality and holiness, and for achievements in their lives. They are recognized to have ongoing influence in God’s work on earth even after they have died. But the New Testament uses the word Saint in a different way.

² To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours: (1 Corinthians 1:2).

***Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
To God’s holy people in Ephesus,^[a] the faithful in Christ Jesus: (Ephesians 1:1)***

All who are Believers in Jesus are referred to as Holy. All believers in Jesus are referred to as Saint. So if you have trusted Jesus as your Savior, if you are a follower of Jesus, you are a Saint. You may not always feel very “saintly” but that is how the Bible refers to you.

So when we observe All Saints Day, “Saints” refers to **all believers** in Jesus. The day is a day to recognize and honor **saints** who have died. They may have died as martyrs for their faith, or simply finished their life in this world and now have passed on. And as we remember them, we are to be inspired to follow their examples as faithful witnesses

Observances of All Saints Day will vary from Church to Church and from believer to believer. We can remember and honor Saints from throughout history who have impacted our lives or impacted the work of God in this world. But as some folks observe All Saints Day they may remember loved ones from their family or Church Community who have died. That may be particularly important in this unusual year – 2020. In this year of COVID pandemic and quarantine, some have not had appropriate opportunities to grieve the loss of a family member, friend or a fellow Church member. Or to celebrate their lives. Changes needed to be made in the way we gathered for funerals. Attendance was limited. We could not gather for times of fellowship and remembering. And so as we remember “**Saints**” who have impacted us, we may still be processing feelings of grief and sadness. We look again to the Great Shepherd who promises to walk with us through the times of grief and sorrow, through the valley of the shadow of death. It is important for us to find meaningful ways to grieve our losses. All Saints Day provides us with an opportunity to remember, honor, celebrate and give thanks to God for the gifts of Saints that he has brought into our lives.

This holiday is an opportunity for us to remember some important realities that must impact our faith journey. This text that I read from Hebrews 11 and 12 is important as we celebrate this day. The 11th chapter of Hebrews is sometimes referred to as the Faith Chapter. The author begins the chapter with this definition of Faith: **11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the people of old received their commendation.** The writer then tells us about “people of old” (Saints) from the past, most of whose stories are recorded in the Old Testament who practiced faith as he describes it here in verse 1. He tells us about **Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses,** and many more. These “people of old” were commended by God for their faith. And if we want to please God, to be commended by God, we should learn from their lives and example. They are our teachers. As he writes about Abel, he says that **Abel “still speaks to us, even though he is dead.”** Now we do not pray to saints. We do not believe that Saints from the past “speak” to us in audible voices. But their lives still impact us.

And then as he transitions into chapter 12, he makes this observation: **1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,**

What do we gain by remembering these Saints. First of all, we are reminded that there is an **Eternal component** to life. He first of all helps us to see that life is not limited to what we experience in this world. The picture is that these saints who have died, who have departed from this world have gone on to another world where they continue to be alive. These believers have formed a cloud who surround us. If this holiday brings to mind family members, brothers and sisters in Christ, who have died and if this holiday has awakened feelings of grief again, we are encouraged to remember that our loved ones have not ceased to exist. They have joined this cloud of witnesses who surround us. Dr. Derek Weber as he encourages us to remember the eternal nature of life says: **[Thinking of eternity] is a way of looking through all that is surrounding us now into a future that looks significantly different.** Life in this world is unpredictable, and short filled with trouble and tribulation. But this is not all there is! Hallelujah!

One Church: A 2nd reality that this holiday reminds us of is that there is one Church. When we become followers of Jesus, we are now connected to these people of faith who have come before. We are now the **People of God.** The verse in this wonderful Hymn “For All the Saints” says it like this:

**O blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
All are one in Thee, for all are Thine.
Alleluia, Alleluia**

That is such an uplifting thought to realize that we are a part of the community of faith that God has been forming and who will enjoy life in His presence for all eternity. All Saints Day lifts our spirits upward, out of the despair of life in this world to remind us of our Identity with the People of God.

A third reality that this day brings to mind is that we are to **Be Encouraged to Persevere and Overcome Sin:** As we think about this picture that the author paints for us, he tells us that we are surrounded by this

community of saints from all ages. As we observe them, we are to be encouraged by their example. Dr. Weber suggests that All Saints Day is not only a time to remember but is a **Call to Action**. As we remember the lives of Saints from the distant past, or even from the recent past, let us be inspired by their lives. Let us be encouraged to think about the way we are living our lives. How does the things they taught us with their words or example impact the way we live our lives. If they were able to remain faithful in spite of what they went through, we can be as well. The writer of the passage in Hebrews tells us that as we look to the lives of these Saints from the past, we must **be ready to throw off everything** that hinders us, and the sin that entangles us. The word that is translated “everything that hinders us” is an athletic term. It is used to teach runners that they must get rid of the extra weight that may be slowing them down or holding them back. It could be something physical, or it could be something else that slows us down. But we must throw it off like a garment. He then says we must be ready to “de-tangle” ourselves from the things that might trip us up. This past summer my wife and I were in a cherry orchard. I was walking between the rows of cherry trees, and my feet got tangled up in the weeds and grass on the ground, and I went down! We have to be cautious about the evil that may be tangling us and get untangled so that we don’t fall.

So as we observe this holiday, as we reflect on the lives of those who have gone before, we must follow their example. We must make sure our vision has a single focus. ***“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame....”***

I want to encourage you to be inspired, be encouraged to be faithful in your life for God, by remember the example and witness of others.