

November 5, 2017

All Saints' Day

*Why is All Saints' Day Important?*

Hebrews 12:1-3

**Opening words:** Today, we observe All Saints' Day. The actual date of All Saints' Day is November 1. All Saints' Day was created by Pope Boniface IV. He wanted the church martyrs to be remembered. The first All Saints' Day was observed on May 13, 609. Later, it was moved to November 1 to try to overshadow Halloween. It didn't work. Halloween has become a national obsession. Did you know America spent \$7.4 billion on Halloween? That means the average American spent \$77 on the dark holiday. It is crazy but true. We even spent \$350 million on pet costumes. My goal today is not to frighten you. My goal today is to help you appreciate All Saints' Day. For this reason, I have called this message *Why is All Saints' Day Important?* Our traditional reading on this day is Hebrews 12:1-3.

**Hebrews 12:1-3** 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, <sup>2</sup> fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

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Mother Angelica once said, "*Saints are ordinary people who do what they do for the love of Jesus, say what they must say without fear, love their neighbor even when they are cursed by him, and live without regret over yesterday or fear of tomorrow.*" That quote speaks to me. If that quote speaks to you, say, "**Amen!**"

We are instructed today from the Epistle to the Hebrews. It was written about the year AD 70. For over 1200 years, the church considered the Apostle Paul to be the author of this epistle. Now, some have doubts. Several names have been thrown around. No one knows for sure, but one thing is sure. It is still the word of God. The recipients of the letter were Jewish converts who were familiar with the Old Testament. Two thousand years later, we can relate to their story.

Many are leaving the church and resigning from the Christian faith. I do not know where they are going. I do not know why they are going. Where does one go from church? However, I do know this unknown author is imploring the people to stay. If you use your sanctified imagination, you can see him blocking the exit, begging them to stay. He uses the most powerful weapon in his arsenal. He appeals to both their hearts and minds. He gets personal. He reminds them of everyone who died in the faith. He asks them the question, if they could endure, why can't you? If you walk away from the

faith, then you walk away from them too. Then, he digs deeper. He reminds them that they are not alone. They are, and we are, surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. Each one died in the faith and should never be forgotten. The unknown pastor knew what we know:

**It's important to remember the saints of the church!** Do you remember the opening words? All Saints' Day was created by Pope Boniface IV, so the martyrs of the church wouldn't be forgotten. We went through this list several weeks ago. I will list them again today because I don't want you to forget them. It is important to remember them.

In that great cloud of witnesses are the disciples who died in service to Jesus himself. They were the seeds of the church. Of the twelve disciples, only John died of natural causes. The rest had a more violent end. Andrew took the Gospel to present-day Russia, Turkey and Greece. Tradition tells us he was crucified. Thomas went as far as India and died when speared by four soldiers. Philip went to North Africa and died in a prison. Matthew went to Ethiopia and was stabbed. James went to Syria and was clubbed to death. Simon the Zealot went to Persia and was killed because he wouldn't make a sacrifice to the god of the sun. Matthias, the disciple who replaced Judas Iscariot, went to Syria and was burned to death. Paul and Peter went to Rome. They both died in the year 66. Paul, the greatest evangelist the world has ever known, was beheaded. Peter was crucified upside-down at his own request because he felt he wasn't worthy to die like Jesus. How can you forget them? It is important to remember them. They were not the only martyrs.

It is important to remember all of the martyrs of the church. Every generation has resisted the Gospel. Have you ever stopped to consider how many saints have been martyred in the history of the church? There is no exact number because some are unknown, and not all are accepted by every denomination or sect. Only God knows the answer to that question, but the incomplete list is filled with impressive names. Polycarp of Smyrna and Justin Martyr died in the age of martyrs, the second to the fourth century. In the Middle Ages, from the fifth to the fifteenth century, John Huss (1415) and Joan of Arc (1431) were martyred. During the Reformation Era, the sixteenth century, William Tyndale (1535) and Anne Askew (1546) were martyred. Even in the twentieth century believers were martyred for taking a stand for the gospel. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1945) and Oscar Romero were martyred (1980). How can you forget them? It is important to remember them.

**It's important to remember our departed loved ones!** How many have you lost in your life? It is one of the curses of growing old. You spend your time going to the doctor. You spend your time going to funerals. How many neighbors have you seen buried? How many co-workers have you seen buried? How many friends have you seen buried? How many family members have you seen buried? Have you ever looked through an old church pictorial directory and counted all the people who have passed?

It is a difficult thing to do. On every line, on every page there is someone. Each one had a different story. Each one had different gifts. They were not just kitchen workers, Sunday school teachers and choir members. What were they really? They were disciples of Jesus Christ. You grew in the faith together but now they are gone. How can you forget them? It is important to remember them.

The hardest ones to remember are the newest to this great cloud. Like a freshly dug grave, our grieving is real. We are still trying to live our lives without them. My prayers do not go out to them. Their burdens and worries in this world are gone. My prayers go out to those of you who are trying to live the rest of your lives without them. In the past twelve months, we lost eleven church members.

May we never forget:

Charles Brunswick  
June Grimm  
Helen Thellman  
Ron Uhr  
Eugene Vollmer  
Rose Cobbett  
Griffith Thomas  
Jean Macaulay  
Betty Wallace  
Beverly Mitchell  
Ann Baumiller

How can we forget them? It is important to remember them. The pagans say, the deceased are still with us if their memories live. I believe that is true. If you find some truth in that statement, say, "**Amen!**" However, there is one more thing you must remember on All Saints' Day.

**It's important to remember the saving acts of Jesus!** At every funeral where I officiate, I remind people of the saving acts of Jesus. You know the story. Jesus was born in the ordinary way, yet he lived an extraordinary life. He never committed a single sin and deserved to live a nice long life. This is the problem: He didn't. His enemy aligned his forces against him and Jesus died a young man. It was a Friday afternoon and the sky grew dark. They took his lifeless body off the cross and laid it in the tomb. On Friday night, his loved ones cried, but his enemies celebrated. On Saturday, the longest day in the history of the world, Jesus was dead. There is nothing else to say. On Sunday morning, the last of his loved ones came to do the worst job. They were the ones who had the great discovery. Jesus had come back to life! I cannot tell you how that happened, because I can't explain a miracle. However, that miracle is the foundation of our faith. It changed everything. Without the resurrection, it is over with the funeral lunch. But, with the resurrection, there is so much more. With the resurrection, there is the great promise of eternal life. With the resurrection, there is

hope of a heaven and a wonderful reunion with departed loved ones. Today, we observe All Saints' Day. May we never forget what Jesus has done for us!

Do you remember the words of Mother Angelica? She said, "*Saints are ordinary people who do what they do for the love of Jesus, say what they must say without fear, love their neighbor even when they are cursed by him, and live without regret over yesterday or fear of tomorrow.*"