

Friends, may grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and Christ Jesus our Lord.

All Saints' Day is a sort of family reunion. We've all come together to celebrate the big family of all God's children. They may not all be with us in person, but they're here in spirit. All Saints' Sunday is the day we remember and honour all the people who have shaped us into who we are. We recognize the effect they've had on making us who we are. Some of them are still walking this earth. Some have died – maybe only a few days ago, or centuries ago. In short, it's the day we laud the communion of saints.

The communion of saints. This vast community comprises ALL the saints. It spans across time and space to include those of us currently living and those who have completed their lives, who now dwell face to face with God. They see now with the long vision of eternity. They see from God's perspective; they hold all of time within the single span of now. They can see around time's corner, too, to those saints who are yet to be named. It's a vast family portrait. It bends around time and space to capture ALL the saints.

As the saints on EARTH, we see, as Paul said, through a mirror, dimly. Our perspective is short-sighted. We're in the trenches, you and I. Our lives of faith are filled with troubled waters. We face hardship and uncertainty. We're challenged by jealousy and anger, fear and just simple exhaustion. We're beset by violence and calamity, despair and sorrow.

They cloud our vision, and they make the call to faithful living anything but crystal clear. We are in the throes of what St. John called in our reading from Revelation "the great ordeal."

By contrast, the saints who have completed their life's course now see from heaven's perspective. They've come through the great ordeal, and now they're part of the great cloud of witnesses, cheering us onward.

Our gospel reading for today is the cherished passage of Jesus' Beatitudes. Jesus' disciples are seated before him. He teaches them with the wisdom of heaven. He describes who the blessed are. But his blessed ones don't sound so blessed to us!

"Blessed are the poor in spirit.

"Blessed are those who mourn.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake."

These are not deemed blessings by human standards! And yet, Jesus declares these situations as blessed. They are blessings which are hard for us to see from the trenches of worldly struggle. Nevertheless, a blessing is there. Jesus is declaring a word of encouragement to those of us saints in the trenches.

It's a great consolation to know that, in all the stations of our life – both good and evil – we are under the canopy of divine blessing. Jesus's pronouncement of blessing bestows encouragement in our confusion and struggle. Even in the seasons of our harshest trials, there is still a blessing. The light of blessing cannot be extinguished. It shines through the night of our sorrow.

When we look at these beatitudes, we see that they describe Jesus' own life. He was the bearer of mercy; he was pure in heart. He mourned with the grieving; he was humble and poor in spirit. People reviled and cursed him. And in the end, he was crucified for righteousness' sake. In his living and his dying, Jesus embodied all of the stations described in his beatitudes.

But his trials became the very means to bestow the greatest of blessings. For we have received his mercy, we have been called children of God, and the kingdom of heaven is ours.

On this All Saints' Day, we stand shoulder to shoulder with all God's saints in this family portrait. Their presence strengthens and encourages us.

And as we endure, we know that we're never alone. We're surrounded by the great cloud of witnesses, the communion of saints. We uphold and pray for one another. We bend the listening ear, we counsel and comfort.

And those departed saints, they still shine a light through the witness of their lives. While they were engaged by struggle and tumult, we see the witness of their faith. They were by no means perfect! But that's a consolation, too, because neither are we. They were every bit as nearsighted and as weak as we are. Their limitations and errors teach us to be patient and tender with one another and especially to ourselves.

And they encourage us to shine our own light. We walk by faith. We shine our light. We bear witness in our own imperfect and muddling way, to the saints around us and to the saints to come.

Surrounded by the saints in this family portrait, we believe in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life of the world to come. The day when all Saints are united together in person before the throne of God. What a family reunion that will be! Amen.