1st November 2026 – Morning Service

All Saints' Day

Margaret Bradley

Introduction

Last night, many people were marking Halloween, which means 'holy evening', with non-religious customs that have pre-Christian roots. But the lesser-known festival on the following day, All Hallows' or All Saints' Day, is a Christian celebration held on 1 November, which we will be observing this morning.

An early Christian writer, John of Patmos, had a revelation of heaven. There he saw a huge crowd of people of every nation, robed in white, who had come through persecution. They were worshipping God and singing, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen!' (Revelation 7: 12). So, we have come to offer our worship and praises, as we keep the festival which honours all God's faithful people who have died. We begin by singing a hymn based on a 13th Century poem written by Saint Francis of Assisi.

StF 99 – All creatures of our God and King

1) All creatures of our God and King,
lift up your voice and with us sing,
alleluia, alleluia!
O burning sun with golden beam,
and silver moon with softer gleam:

Ch) O praise him, O praise him,
alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

4) Dear mother earth, who day by day
unfolds rich blessings on our way,
O praise him, alleluia!
The flowers and fruits that bloom and grow,
let them his glory also show:

5) All who are of tender heart
forgiving others, take your part,
sing 'Praise him, alleluia!'
all who long pain and sorrow bear,
praise God, and on him cast your care:

6) And now, most kind and gentle death,
waiting to hush our fading breath,
O praise him, alleluia!
You homeward lead the child of God,
and Christ the Lord the way has trod:

7) Let all things their creator bless,
and worship him in humbleness;
O praise him, alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
and praise the Spirit, Three in One:

St Francis of Assisi & William Henry Draper

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Eternal God, to you be glory and praise forever from your people on earth and from the hosts of the glorious company of the saints in light. You are God of the living and of the dead. Your community transcends time and space. You are the creator and maker of all and you only are immortal. Our bodies are mortal and perishable, and death comes to us all. But, as your power raised Jesus from the dead, we trust that, when our mortal flesh is laid aside, our life isn't taken away but changed and that you bring us into new life in your eternal presence with those whom we love that are hidden from us by the shadow of death. So we worship you.

We open our hearts to you with those things in our lives that we regret; things that we have said and done, or didn't say and do, that we now reproach ourselves for. Lift from us any burden of guilt that we carry. Melt any anger that we feel towards you or towards others. Warm our hearts and lead us out of our darkness to walk in your light. Trusting in the assurance of your forgiveness, we accept our calling to be saints on earth. Grant us a foretaste of the hope, love, joy, and peace that you promise to all of your people. In Christ's name we pray. **Amen.**

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The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

Responsive Psalm: Psalm 103:13-17

As a father has compassion on his children, **so is God merciful towards those who honour him.**
God knows of what we are made, **God remembers that we are dust.**
Our days are but as grass, **we flourish as a flower of the field;**
For as soon as the wind goes over it, **it is gone and its place shall know it no more.**
But God's love lasts for ever for those who honour him. **God's goodness endures for all generations.**

Reading: Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-6 (NRSV)

But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,
and no torment will ever touch them.
In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died,
and their departure was thought to be a disaster
and their going from us to be their destruction,
but they are at peace.
For though in the sight of others they were punished,
their hope is full of immortality.
Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good,
because God tested them and found them worthy of himself;
like gold in the furnace he tried them,
and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them.
In the time of their visitation they will shine forth
and will run like sparks through the stubble.
They will govern nations and rule over peoples,
and the Lord will reign over them forever.
Those who trust in him will understand truth,
and the faithful will abide with him in love,
because grace and mercy are upon his holy ones,
and he watches over his elect.

Reading: Matthew 5:1-12 (NRSV)

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.
And he began to speak and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

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“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Reading: Romans 8:31-39 (NRSV)

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son but gave him up for all of us, how will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ who died, or rather, who was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? As it is written,

> “For your sake we are being killed all day long;
> we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than victorious through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

H&P 67 – Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom

1) Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
   Lead thou me on;
   The night is dark, and I am far from home,
   Lead thou me on.
   Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see
   The distant scene; one step enough for me.

2) I was not ever thus, nor prayed that thou
   Should'st lead me on;
   I loved to choose and see my path; but now
   Lead thou me on.
   I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
   Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.

3) So long thy power hath blessed me, sure it still
   Will lead me on,
   O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
   The night is gone;
   And with the morn those angel faces smile,
   Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.

John Henry Newman

Sermon: All Saints

Originally, in the New Testament, the word ‘saints’ applied to all believers who have put their faith in Jesus and meant ‘someone who is being made holy by the Holy Spirit’. The Apostle Paul called ordinary members of the early church – people like you and me – ‘saints’. Later on, the word came to be used of Christians who had died as martyrs or who had led exemplary, virtuous lives. The early church observed days which honoured the deaths of local martyrs and often erected places of worship on sites where their blood had been shed. At Romsley, there is a church dedicated to our local martyr, Saint Kenelm. Kenelm (or Cynehelm) was an Anglo-Saxon boy king who was killed by an ambitious relative in the Clent Hills. His feast day is 17th July. In the 14th Century, pilgrims left offerings at the shrine of St Barbara’s head at Halesowen Abbey. St. Barbara was an early martyr from Phoenicia, said to have been beheaded by her pagan father when she confessed that she had become a Christian. It’s doubtful that this relic was genuine. A cathedral in Kyiv, Ukraine, now claims to possess it. Her feast day is 4th December.

As greater numbers of Christians came to be persecuted in the Roman Empire; there were soon more martyrs than there were days in the year. So, one day came to be set aside in honour of them all. It was called All Saints' Day. At first the festival was held on 13th May, but by the 8th Century, Western Churches had changed it to 1st November. This day was for remembering not just the martyrs but all those who transmitted the Christian faith to succeeding generations and as a reminder that we are one communion with them. It was considered to be a very holy and significant time of the year.

People continue to offer examples of heroic courage as they stand up for what they believe to be right. Above the great west door of Westminster Abbey are ten statues to modern martyrs; Christians who gave up their lives for their beliefs, victims of Nazism, communism, and religious prejudice in the 20th Century. They are drawn from every continent and include Dr. Martin Luther King Junior, the American civil rights campaigner; Saint Archbishop Oscar Romero, who defended human rights in El Salvador; Wang Zhining, a pastor killed during the Chinese cultural revolution; and Mande Masemala, a young South African Christian killed by her parents. Around one in seven Christians in the world today are persecuted for their faith. In atheist states such as North Korea, as well as in Africa and the Middle East, they face worship restrictions, public humiliation, social isolation, violence, torture, and death. They are brave witnesses in the world's most difficult and dangerous places to follow Jesus. Today congregations across the globe are asked to join in an International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. We will be joining in that wave of prayer.

Last October, seven new saints were canonised by Pope Leo. A month earlier Carlo Acutis was also made a saint. He was a 15-year-old, English-born, Italian boy who used digital media to promote Christian devotion before he died of leukaemia. To avoid confusion, some Anglican priests are designated as canons, which means that they serve in the cathedral. I recall offering my congratulations to a former vicar of Cradley, David Rogers, on his canonisation when he was appointed to serve in Worcester Cathedral and we laughed at me using the wrong word, but he was the nearest person to a saint that I have ever known.

Methodists don't convey sainthood upon people, or pray to the saints, or venerate relics, as the Catholic Church does. Instead, we view all true Christian believers as 'saints' in the New Testament sense – ordinary people who have lived faithfully and exemplified the Christian life, as shown by Jesus. Yet the founder of our movement, John Wesley, deeply loved this day, as it gave him the opportunity to reflect on Christian history and to draw inspiration from the examples of those who have gone before. He wrote in his Journal on 1st November 1767, 'a festival I truly love.' And in 1788, 'I find this a comfortable day.' John and his brother Charles are commemorated in the Calendar of Saints in the Anglican tradition. Our next hymn was written by Charles for this day.

StF 744 – Come, let us join our friends above

1) Come, let us join our friends above
that have obtained the prize,
and on the eagle wings of love
to joys celestial rise:
let all the saints terrestrial sing
with those to glory gone;
for all the servants of our King,
in earth and heaven, are one.

2) One family we dwell in him,
one church, above, beneath,
though now divided by the stream,
the narrow stream of death:
one army of the living God,
to his command we bow;
part of his host have crossed the flood,
and part are crossing now.

3) Ten thousand to their endless home
this solemn moment fly;
and we are to the margin come,
and we expect to die;
ev'n now by faith we join our hands
with those that went before,
and greet the blood-besprinkled bands
on the eternal shore.

4) Our spirits too shall quickly join,
like theirs with glory crowned,
and shout to see our captain's sign,
to hear his trumpet sound.
O that we now might grasp our guide!
O that the word were given!
Come, Lord of hosts, the waves divide,
and land us all in heaven.

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Charles Wesley

Prayer

Holy God, we thank you for making us unique individuals, able to find fulfilment in worship and service, in love, creative activity, discovery, and learning, in work, and endeavour. We thank you for setting us in a larger world and a wider companionship, which is of past, present, and future, through the mystical communion of all the saints.

We remember today, with gratitude, the lives of our ancestors in the faith; those faithful witnesses who have gone before us: great leaders and thinkers of the church; those whose goodness transformed all they touched; those who worked hard for the coming of your kingdom; those who faced death in bearing witness to Christ and died as martyrs. May they inspire us for the present and give us vision, hope and courage for the future. Building on their achievements, and learning from their mistakes, may we too be co-workers with you for the fulfilling of your plan for the world.

We give thanks for the courage of our sisters and brothers around the world who accept the risk of bearing witness to your love and grace and who shine as lights in the darkness. We pray for all who are oppressed, reviled, and persecuted; for those who lead and teach your people in the world's hardest places to be a Christian. May their courage and faithfulness be an example to those who seek to wound them. Guide all nations in the ways of freedom, social justice, and peace.

We pray for all who are responsible for the Christian nurture of the young, and commit to your care the newest generation of your saints as we pray for the future of the Church in times of change and challenge. We look forward to the coming of your kingdom, when we, with all Christians not yet born, and with the witnesses of the past, may together praise you and rejoice in the triumph of your perfect love. **Amen.**

Sermon: All Souls

On the evening preceding All Saints' Day, people spent time thinking about the lives of the saints and martyrs and praying that they might be like them. Services were held in churches and candles burned before pictures of the saint. By the 13th Century it had become popular for people to come together on the day after All Saints' Day to honour their ancestors, family members, and friends who are no longer physically present with them and to recognise the contribution their existence made to their lives. This was called All Souls' Day. In many countries people went to visit the graveyards of loved ones.

All-Hallowtide developed into a Christian festival which covered 31st October to 2nd November. The liturgical colour is white, which is symbolic of life and victory over death. These three days are dedicated to remembering all the faithful departed, including the saints and martyrs of the church. But it recognises that we have a psychological need, not just to remember the great ones of the faith, but also the more personal connections we've had, as we recall and honour people whose lives and actions touched our own who have died, and to acknowledge that we are connected to them through God's presence. I don't aspire to the kind of heroism or goodness that will lead to me being canonised by the Pope, but I do hope to serve God faithfully in those things that are given me to do. I'm not brave enough to be like Oscar Romero, or as devoted to the poor as Mother Theresa, but I can draw inspiration from a URC minister from Halesowen, Ernest Cruchley, who now rests in the closer presence of God. In encouraging people in the local community to working and praying for social justice and peace, he showed humility, selfless love, and caring for others and I miss him a lot. You too will have people for whom you want to give thanks today.



Here is a picture of a Triquetra, a Celtic Trinity love-knot. The ancient Celts emphasised the continuity of life, and the way that all things are inter-connected. Their love-knot symbols were based upon a loop that is made from one thread that has no start or finish. You can trace your finger over the one continuous line, interweaving around itself, and see how there is no beginning or end, thus symbolising everlasting love and eternal spiritual life. In the early days of Christianity, the Trinity knot, or Triquetra, began to appear on Celtic stone crosses and slabs. It was also used to decorate beautiful manuscripts created by monks, like the Book of Kells, an illuminated book of the Gospels. This three-cornered knot was a sign of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and it often had a circle going through the three loops to represent the unity and unending nature of God's love.

God's love is without limits. This was revealed to us supremely in the way Christ opened his arms to embrace the world on the cross. God's presence continues to be with us today, through the eternal Spirit, and nothing, not even death, can ever separate us from that love.

The knot doesn't just remind us of the Trinity of everlasting love; it also reminds us of the unity and endless nature of the bonds of family love. We don't exist in isolation, but in a circle of communion with God and within a community of love and caring. Much of what we are, we owe to other people. They have a profound influence upon us, the things that we do and the kind of persons that we become. All-Hallowtide gives us the opportunity to acknowledge, and give thanks for, those who gave us joy and enriched our lives, who have died, but are still treasured and appreciated for what they were and all they gave us. We give thanks for them all, for the times that we shared with them and for everything that we received from them.

Today also gives us the opportunity to commit ourselves to blessing the lives of other people. Just as those we remember who blessed our lives, we would try to continue to have an influence for good on the lives of others. We stand in a line of a great heritage of faith and hope and love. We commit ourselves to transmitting these things to the generations coming after us.

And finally, today gives us the opportunity to lift our hearts and voices to join our praise to God with their hearts and voices, because it's our belief that we are part of an eternal communion of worship, prayer and service that transcends time.

StF 746 – For all the saints who showed your love

1) For all the saints who showed your love
In how they lived and where they moved,
For mindful women, caring men,
Accept our gratitude again.

2) For all the saints who loved your name,
Whose faith increased the Saviour's fame,
Who sang your songs and shared your word,
Accept our gratitude, good Lord.

3) For all the saints who named your will,
And saw your kingdom coming still
Through selfless protest, prayer and praise,
Accept the gratitude we raise.

4) Bless all whose will or name or love
Reflects the grace of heaven above.
Though unacclaimed by earthly powers,
Your life through theirs has hallowed ours.

John L. Bell & Graham Maule *© 1989 WGRG*

Prayers

Hold in your thoughts someone, now deceased, who played an important part of your life, and give thanks for them. (Silence)

Holy God, thank you for redeeming us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and for promising our reunion with those whom we love, temporarily beyond our sight. We give thanks for unsung heroes, whose names are known only to you. And for those in our own lives who have shown us the way of holiness, those who influenced our lives through their love, care, teaching and preaching. We ask that, through your Holy Spirit, you will grant us grace to follow their example.

We pray for our families and friends who are still alive. May we support each other in times of crisis and sadness as well as in times of joy.

We pray for people who are anxious about the future, those who are confused, bewildered, and hurt, those who are engulfed by depression, and those who are suffering physical illness… In your presence may they find comfort and strength.

We pray for our nation. Guide those who make laws in Parliament. May your will be done in the political and economic life of our country. Heal the divisions in our society so that we might live together with respect, tolerance, and compassion for all, especially the voiceless and vulnerable.

We remember before you those who have recently died and those who grieve for them. May they be sustained by the knowledge that nothing in life or death is able to separate us from your love, and that we are all one in the life of our Risen Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Holy God, enfold all whom we have remembered today in the arms of your mercy, in the blessed rest of everlasting peace, and in the glorious company of the saints in light. Bring us all, living and departed, to fulfilment in you. **Amen.**

StF 503 – Love Divine

1) Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

2) Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

3) Finish then thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise!

Charles Wesley

Blessing

May the infinite and glorious Trinity, God the Creator, Son, and Holy Spirit, give to you, and all those whom you love, comfort and peace, light and joy this All-Hallowtide, and, after our journey through this world, grant us eternal life with the saints. **Amen.**

Go to be an influence for good, remembering that neither death nor life can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

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