

Happy All Saints Sunday! Since the 3rd century the Christian church has honored on this day brothers and sisters who have passed into glory. This morning we're going to talking about what this day means for us in our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

1st JOHN 3:1-3

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

All Hallows Eve is the night before All Hallows Day, officially October 31st and November 1st, respectively. "Hallow" is an Old English word which means "holy," as in, those who have died in Christ are holy. As you probably know, Halloween is the secular version of this sacred day.

The idea of costumes and candy for children on Halloween is a relatively new and Western idea. But nearly all Christian cultures have some kind of tradition for honoring their dead on this day, celebrating their lives and their blessed end in the love of Christ.

For instance, in Austria, godparents give their godchildren braided pastry representing the integration of their lives with the divine. In France, the people visit the gravesites of their loved ones with flowers which represent eternal life. And in Guatemala the people fly kites representing their spiritual unity with the deceased who've ascended to the Lord.

Today, as we remember those who've passed before us, we're reminded of God's promises and the faith which we hold in our own hearts for a blessed end. Someone else said All Hallows Day is a commemoration of the mystical union of

the body of Christ, of all the saints, living and dead, for those who've died are not dead, but they're alive in Christ. This is a celebration of God's work among God's people, among you and me and those who have preceded us.

There's great joy in this remembrance, thus the title of my message, "The Lord Is My Joy." Let's consider the reading from the epistle this morning, 1st John 3:1-3. St. John wrote, **1st John 3:1a, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."**

The "**kind of love**" John was talking about is the sacrificial, reconciling love of Jesus, the kind of love that cost him his life, the kind of love that crushed the devil into the dirt, the kind of love that made a rebellious people, you and me, into children of God.

St. Paul wrote, **Galatians 3:26-27, "in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."**

Through baptism and faith, we have "**put on Christ,**" and we "**are all sons of God.**" God's love pours over us just as a father's unquenchable, unconditional, unremittent love pours over his beloved son, his son in whom he sees himself, his son in whom he sees the fulfillment of all his dreams. That's how God sees you and me. That's how great his love is for us.

St. John continued, writing, **1st John 3:1b, "The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him."**

When John wrote "**the world**" "**did not know him,**" he did not mean the world didn't get the memo, as in, "There's a god? Who'dvthunk?" What John meant was the world denies Jesus is the Son of God, the one who died on the Cross for mans' sins, the one who rose from the grave on the 3rd day gifting us with eternal life. That's the knowledge of God which the world rejects, hands down.

Indeed, Jesus was despised by the people of the world for they didn't like what he said about them, that they needed to be forgiven for their sins against God and against one another. And they certainly didn't like being told how they should live.

But Jesus told them anyway. He said, **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”** How hard is that to do? Very hard! For the people of the world stopped up their ears and cried out, **“Crucify him!”**

The lies, the hatemongering, the massacre of eleven Jewish people in worship two weeks ago – there seems to be no end to the number of ways the people of the world can find to live contrary to God’s Word.

Let us not fool ourselves into believing that this was an aberration. The world despises Jesus and his teaching. Acts of violence like what we’ve seen recently are only an outward sign of the darkness in men’s hearts which has always been there.

St. John continued, writing, **1st John 3:2, “Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”**

Remember the story of how after Moses gazed upon the shadow of God’s glory and how his face was illuminated so brightly he had to wear a veil when he returned to the people? This was a sign, a sign of God’s light, that light which overcomes the darkness of the human heart, the light which is the sign of God dwelling among his people, coming to us in his son, Jesus, the light of the world.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, when Jesus comes again we will stand in his presence, gaze into his eyes, and we shall be transformed, and we will be re-created in his image, the divine. At that moment, despite our frailty in this life, we will be made strong. Despite our sickness and disease, we will be made whole. Despite the dark night of the soul and even death, we will be raised up in glory, in dignity, in love, in the joy of the Lord!

St. John finished this passage, writing, **1st John 3:3, “And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”**

Friends in Christ, we purify ourselves when we believe the promises of God, that the blood of the Lamb of God cleanses us from sin, making our garments white as snow, clothing us with the righteousness of Christ with the waters of Holy Baptism, that the Word of God is the testimony of the Almighty of his love for you

and me through his son, Jesus, and that Jesus, indeed, is our Living Water, that water which quenches the thirst of those who've tread the road of faith for lo these many years.

Therein is our joy, a great joy indeed.

Today, let us celebrate those who have come before us for the difference they made in our hearts, for the testimony of Christ in their lives, and let us celebrate how the Lord continues his work in each of our lives day by day.

This week let us strive to make a difference in the world, the world that despises God's love in Christ, a love which we cling to with all our strength.

And this week let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.