

Fourth Sunday before Advent 2017

This period of the year we seem to spend a lot of time remembering with All Saints, All Souls and Remembrance Sunday all coming within the first half of November.

All Saints' Day

All Saints' Day (also known as All Hallows' Day or Hallowmas) is the day after All Hallows' Eve (Hallowe'en). It is a feast day celebrated on **1st November** by Anglicans and Roman Catholics.

It is an opportunity for believers to remember all saints and martyrs, known and unknown, throughout Christian history. As part of this day of obligation, believers are required to attend church and try not to do any servile work.

Remembering saints and martyrs and dedicating a specific day to them each year has been a Christian tradition since the 4th century AD, but it wasn't until 609AD that Pope Boniface IV decided to remember *all* martyrs. Originally 13th May was designated as the Feast of All Holy Martyrs. Later, in 837AD, Pope Gregory IV extended the festival to remember all the saints, changed its name to Feast of All Saints and changed the date to 1st November.

We celebrate today the solemnity of All Saints. This invites us to turn our gaze to the immense multitude of those who have already reached the blessed land, and points us on the path that will lead us to that destination.

All Souls' Day

All Souls' Day is marked on **2nd November** (or the **3rd** if the 2nd is a Sunday), directly following All Saints' Day, and is an opportunity for Roman Catholics and Anglo-Catholic churches to commemorate the faithful departed. They remember and pray for the souls of people who are in Purgatory - the place (or state) in which those who have died atone for their less grave sins before being granted the vision of God in Heaven (called *Beatific vision*).

Reasoning behind this stems from the notion that when a soul leaves the body, it is not entirely cleansed from venial (minor) sins. However, through the power of prayer and self-denial, the faithful left on earth may be able to help these souls gain the Beatific Vision they seek, bringing the soul eternal sublime happiness.

A 7/8th century AD prayer *The Office of the Dead* is read out in some churches on All Souls' Day. Other rituals include the offering of Requiem Mass for the dead, visiting family graves and reflecting on lost loved ones. Here at St Mary's

the names of the departed were read out during the All Soul's day Eucharist which was not very well attended.

Whilst praying for the dead is an ancient Christian tradition, it was Odilo, Abbot of Cluny (France) who, in 998AD, designated a specific day for remembering and praying for those in the process of purification. This started as a local feast in his monasteries and gradually spread throughout the Catholic Church towards the end of the 10th century AD.

Perhaps these prayers written specially for these occasions will help us to understand more clearly.

Lord, today,

We thank you for the Saints now gone before us whose faith defined their living and their dying; those who loved you more than their own lives; those who are still mirrors of your love.

We celebrate the saints who walk among us rejoicing while they walk in your footsteps, making your name known in a fractured world, against injustice, prejudice, hatred, evil. We stand with those who sacrifice themselves to bring about your kingdom here on earth.

Lord, your grace shines in the lives of Saints. We thank you for their example, their holy words. Your Spirit inspired them. Come Holy Spirit inspire us to be saints in your Church now.

Lord, in November,

We call to mind all those whose lives are done. We thank you that their time, now completed, however short or long, sad or joyful, is gathered up, looked on and known by you.

We offer up remembrance: those whose absence we feel daily; those who have shaped us; those who have nurtured us; the people we are grateful to have walked with; all those we hardly knew

but wished we'd known better. We give thanks for all they gave and all the future owes them.

Lord, your love embraces every person who has ever lived; you promised that you lost none. May your Spirit make us always thankful for all our gifts of love and cherished memory.

Amen.