

## Part 1: November's feasts of All Saints and All Souls

*Lives taken and lives given: We will remember them!*

Each November, we Christians remember the Saints and Souls who have gone ahead of us. It is part of our tradition, a distinguishing aspect of our communal identity. We celebrate what we cannot afford to forget and 'play forward' our hopes to become, as Christians, living expressions of the communion of love and connectedness in which God created us, and for which Jesus lived his life among us.

As a late teenager in the early 1940s Catholic priest, Johannes Metz, served in the German army. The experience shocked him radically. After priesthood he became a significant theological scholar, teaching that we ought never again do our 'God-talk' with our backs to events like Auschwitz. We must face squarely the realities of human suffering that has happened among us. We must remember.

Applying this in our time and place means being truthful in acknowledging suffering that has surrounded us: the impact of sexual and domestic violence on people's minds and spirits, the shock of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the challenges of "Black Lives Matter"; the struggles of peoples right across Asia and the Pacific, with particular recognition of our immediate neighbours, Timor Leste and West Papua; horror from terrorist attacks, massacres, ecological failures, natural disasters, refugee and asylum seeker struggles, persistent social injustice and poverty, the marginalisation of minorities, and humanly-destructive dynamisms like sexism and ageism... to name but a few.

Metz's "practical/political theology" ought also lead us to realise that we cannot pray and talk about the feasts of All Saints and All Souls on 1 and 2 November this year without consciousness of the human reality of pain in the current pandemic through which God's living word comes to us. As some people suffer and die, others with medical, political and economic responsibilities give their lives serving them, just as martyrs have done across the centuries! Lest we forget!

On 11 November, we will remember the ending of the Great War and this year's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World War II's ending. As we do each Anzac Day we will voice our gratitude for sacrifice, mourn our loss, grieve waste, and promise: "*At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them.*" Rejoicing in the memory of war's ending, we will charge ourselves with the responsibility to continue to pray and work for peace. At such times our faith talk and our civic language come together. Why should we be surprised when we recognise God most clearly when faith language touches into human experience most perceptively?

A prayer from *Tui Motu* journal expresses what we are called to remember in our Christian faith in these November feasts:

Encourage us, Creative Spirit, to walk with footprints weighed in gratitude,  
to choose energy that sustains all life so that we leave only love in our trail. [*Tui Motu*, Oct. 2018 p 32]

## **Part 2: The flavour of today's celebration of All Saints and All Souls, November 1 and 2.**

The best window into the contemporary Church's believing on *All Saints* and *All Souls* is through their liturgies. These clearly encourage the honouring of those whose lives have revealed God well. They petition God, the source of all holiness, to share that holiness with us, thus reflecting Vatican II's teaching in # 40 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church that all are equally called to holiness, by virtue of equal baptism into Christ.

Romans 14:7-9 voices the primordial intuition that Christ connects all who have ever lived and died.

*The life and death of each of us has its influence on others.*

*We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.<sup>1</sup>*

Like 1 Cor chs 11-12, it testifies that members of Christians build each other into the communion which Paul calls the "Body of Christ".

Benedictine, Sister Joan Chittister, reflects on how we influence others:

*"Those who have lived well for their own time have lived well for all times... Not only do we die into resurrection ourselves but if we have lived with respect for life, for the living, we leave resurrection in our wake as we go. The way we live ripples across time, touching people we never see, changing places we never went, singing a sound that never ends. To see the individual life as insignificant is to dismiss the meaning of life itself."<sup>1</sup>*

### **Historical developments**

Celebrating revered persons and praying for departed souls are practices that evolved gradually into the Christian feasts of *All Saints* and *All Souls*. Once formalised, their settled placement side by side in the liturgical calendar over many centuries shows that, despite varying emphases at different times, wisdom sees them together: "*Saints 'n' Souls*".

Across 2 millennia before Vatican II *All Saints* had become a festive honouring of recognised saints and martyrs, whereas *All Souls* held a more penitential flavour, heralding a month of rigorous prayer for those souls thought still to be journeying fully into God.

Emerging from monastic practices early in 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium as a formal feast, and gradually spreading across the Church, *All Souls* had its base in the long-standing practice of praying for the departed. Bishop Ambrose of Milan, for example, urged his people in the 4<sup>th</sup> century to pray for their dead. That his words consoled human hearts in need of consoling has ensured they are still being repeated:

*"We have loved them in life. Let us not forget them in death."*

### **Ancient Christian belief in the 'communio sanctorum' covers All Souls as well as All Saints**

Originally broad in scope, the Latin term, '*communio sanctorum*' referred not just to people who had died, but to the "communion" of all holy business; holy people and holy things. This encompassed holy saints, souls and sinners, holy Scripture and holy Tradition, holy worship and Sacraments, holy mission and evangelising, holy actions for justice and charity, holy hoping and praying, holy art, holy writings and music, holy teaching and learning, holy living and dying, holy loving and birthing, holy cooking and eating, holy working and playing, and always in emphasis, holy suffering through identification with Christ, the Holy One. This was the *life-in-communion* of all those of any age and generation from whom the waters of baptism into Christ would never dry.

### **Conclusion**

Among the saints and souls celebrated each November are regular people doing their best to be all they were called to be by their creator. Among them were some who left a lasting ripple of influence: martyrs and missionaries, mystics and mavericks, single men and women, mums and dads, grandmas, grandpas, aunts, uncles, cousins, siblings, friends, sisters, brothers, priests, bishops and popes.

Reflecting on them both consoles and encourages us as we face our own lives' realities and incompleteness and endeavour to learn from them the ways of holiness and decent human-beinghood in the mode of Jesus, to whose good and faithful life they point.

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