Sermon: All the Saints

(Preached at St. Giles, Ottawa, Nov.1, 2026, All Saints Day)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

There once was a farmer from the Prairie who died and went on to the Great Beyond. As he approached the great gate, he noticed that the terrain was bare with no greenery, for miles on end. He remarked to the gate keeper, “Good day, Saint Peter. Say, this looks just like back home, where I came from.” "The gatekeeper replied, "First of all, I'm not Saint Peter and second, you really have no idea where you are at all, do you?"

There once was a priest who was preparing a man for his long day's journey into the night. Whispering firmly, the priest said, "Denounce the Devil! Let him know how little you think of his evil!" The dying man said nothing. The priest repeated his demand beside the death bed, “Denounce the Devil!” Still the dying man said nothing. Puzzled, the priest asked, "Why do you refuse to denounce the Devil and his evil?" The dying man said, “Well, until I am sure where I'm heading, I don't think I ought to be aggravating anybody, right?”

Again, there was this other man laying on his death bed. He wants to take all his possessions with him. So he tells his wife and children to place all his belongings on the roof, so he would grab them on his way to heaven. The man dies. A few days later his wife and children see that his possessions are still on the roof. Quipped his wife, “I knew we should have put his stuff in the basement.”

Brothers and sister in Christ, as we gather here, a day after the All Hallow’s Eve, or commonly known as Halloween, I hope you all had some fun last night poking at death, making a mockery of dying. In the midst of party costumes, pumpkin carvings and trick-or-treating, I trust that you understand Halloween’s Christian origin, of invoking the power of humour and ridicule to confront the power of death, just as Apostle Paul proclaimed, in 1 Cor. 15:55,

“*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting*?”

Still, on this day, the day after the All Hallow's Eve, or common known as the All Saints' Day, I would like to invite you to consider this most serious questions: Where are we going, when death inevitably overtakes our physical bodies?

All Saints' Day is the day for us to remember the saints, the martyrs and those departed faithful. It is a day we look forward to the future, a future as described in Revelation 7, according to the vision of Saint John, giving us a glimpse of the Kingdom of God. The scene described in Revelation 7 takes place in the heavenly throne room, where the heavenly host of angels, elders and living creatures are before the throne of God.

In the previous chapters, we were introduced to the four living creatures. They are described as having each four faces—of lion, of ox, of a man, and of a flying eagle, representing the pinnacle of the created order. They are covered with eyes, front and back and all around, symbolizing complete vigilance and divine omniscience. Each creature has six wings, mirroring the description of the seraphim in Isaiah 6. These four living creatures worship the Lord God seeming ceaselessly, crying out,

"*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,*
who was, and is and is to come." (Revelation 4:8)

We were also introduced to the 24 elders, who are seated on thrones around the great throne of God. They are clothed in white garments, symbolizing purity and righteousness. They wear golden crowns, which they cast and place before the throne, symbolizing all powers, authorities and principalities being subdued before the Lord God.

In the first part of chapter 7, we also witness the gathering of the servants of God, those whose foreheads are stamped with God's very own seal. These servants, described as remnants of Israel are numbered 144,000, representing 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes. Biblical scholars have long debated on the meaning of this number 144,000. This really should not be taken literally to mean only 144,000 are saved, as the number is the multiplication of 12 times 12 times 1,000—the twelves tribes of Israel multiplying by the 12 disciples of Jesus multiplying by 1,000, which in Hebrew numerology means 'the multitude'. The way I read this number is the multitude in the Old Testament expanded by the multitude in the New Testament, and further expanded by the multitude that no one could count.

It is this great multitude from every nation, from all tribes and people and languages, now stand before the throne and before the Lamb, crying out in a loud praise, saying in verse 10,

> "*Salvation belongs to our God*
> *who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb!*"

The praise of this earthly multitude is further amplified by a crescendo of praise from the heavenly host, of angels, elders, and the four living creatures, while prostrating before the throne, worshiping the Lord God, saying in verse 12,

> "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom
> and thanksgiving and honour and power and might
> be to our God forever and ever! Amen!"

It really is an incredible scene wrapped in mystery and glory that defies comprehension nor easy explanation. Just in case one might be confused, you are not alone, as one of the elders addresses Saint John, saying "*Who are these ,robed in white, and where have they come from?*" To such a cryptic question, the Apostle could only humbly reply, "*Sir, you are the one who knows.*" Why ask me? Who am I that I should presume to know the thinking and the doing of God.

Such a cryptic exchange harkens us back to the Valley of the Dry Bones, in Ezekiel 37, whereby the Lord God addresses the prophet, saying "*Mortal, can these dry bones live?*" (v.3) And the only response the prophet could offer is simply, "*O Lord God, you know.*" Such symbolic exchanges speak of deference, deferring to the absolute sovereignty of God. If the Holy One of Israel could raise the people of Israel from death, then the Lord God could certainly gather all nations and all people from all languages and all tribes.

But for what purpose, to what end? We are soon informed by the elder who first posed the question. Sure enough, he knows, as he explains in Revelation 7:14,

> "*These are they who have come out of the great ordeal;*
> *they have washed their robes and made them white*
> *in the blood of the Lamb.*"

By the blood of Christ, the faithful who have endured the great tribulation are thus robed in white, are made pure, and are set apart to be holy. Their sufferings have now ended, for the Lord God shall be their (and our) shelter, as we will hunger and thirst no more, the sun will not strike us nor any scorching heat. Christ Jesus shall be their (and our) shepherd, for he will guide us to springs of the water of life, and wipe away every tears from our eyes.

That is what awaits us, those who remain faithful, and persevere through whatever life may throw at us, be it ridicule, rejection, or persecution; be it bias, prejudice, or injustice; be it insecurity of food, housing or physical-self; be it break-down in relationships, or mental health.

Knowing what awaits us and where we are going, it changes how we face those adversities. It leads us to trust in the One God who has been faithful. It leads us to hope that all adversities can be overcome and God will wipe away all tears. It leads us to love others, as we have been so loved, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Allow me to finish this message with yet another story. Once upon a time a house caught fire in the middle of the night, and a young girl was forced to flee to the roof. The father stood on the ground below with outstretched arms, calling out to his daughter, “Jump, I’ll catch you”, knowing full well the only chance she has was to listen and obey.

However, all the little girl could see was flame, smoke, and blackness. As could be imagined, she was afraid to leave the safety of that soon to be consumed roof. Her father kept yelling, “Jump! I will catch you.” But the scared little girl protested, “Daddy, I can’t see you.” The father replied calmly, “But I can see you and that’s all that matters.”

Isn’t that what our lives are like? Our journeys of faith enable us to face life or meet death, not because we can see, but with the utmost certainty that we are seen; not that we know all the answers, but with the utmost clarity that we are known. We are seen and known by the Father who created us, the Son who redeems us, and the Spirit who sustains us, We are seen and known by the Triune God who loves us still in a steadfast love that will never cease. For that we give thanks.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.