St. Columba's Episcopal Church
All Saints' Day – November 1, 2026
The Communion of Saints
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

As you know, November 1st is All Saints' Day. This year November 1st falls on Sunday, so we celebrate today. When November 1st falls on another day of the week, All Saints' Day is celebrated on the following Sunday, which is then called All Saints' Sunday. Because Guy can't be here today, we aren't able to sing two of our favorite hymns, "For all the saints" and "I sing a song of the saints of God." In order not to miss them completely, I'm taking some liberty with the liturgical calendar, and we will celebrate All Saints' Sunday next week. Today's liturgy and next week's liturgy will both have elements of our usual celebration of All Saints' Day. It is a major feast day in the church calendar, and in my opinion, worth honoring twice.

We will renew our Baptismal Vows in a few minutes. The preface to the promises we will make is tailored to All Saints' Day. "In Holy Baptism we have become part of that great fellowship of believers in all times and places: the Communion of Saints." So, this is a perfect day to focus on what we call the "Communion of Saints." How do we understand this in the Episcopal Church? In "An Outline of the Faith, commonly called the Catechism" found at the back of the Book of Common Prayer, we find this brief summary of the Church's teaching: "the communion of saints is the whole family of God, the living and the dead … bound together in Christ by sacrament, prayer, and praise" (page 862).

In the Foreword to a book called "Holy Women, Holy Men: Celebrating the Saints," former Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Frank T. Griswold, wrote: "These courageous souls bore witness to Christ's death-defying love, in service, in holiness of life, and in challenge to existing practices and perspectives within both the Church and society. The men and women commemorated in the Calendar are not simply examples of faithfulness to inspire us: they are <u>active</u> in their love and prayer. They are companions in the Spirit able to support and encourage us as we seek to be faithful in our own day."

In our church we believe that the people who have lived and died before us are not beyond our reach, and we are not beyond theirs. The dead in Christ may help us while we live. Some people can feel that love, support, and presence, and this can be a powerful experience. It may also be an experience people are reluctant to share. We may feel "odd" if we reveal – even to other Christians – that we feel the presence or the love and prayerful support of someone who has died. Such experiences are not shared by everyone and are generally not features of daily living, but our church honors the active fellowship and intercommunion of the living and the dead in the Body of Christ.

The day after All Saints' Day, November 2nd, is called All Souls' Day, the day when we commemorate All Faithful Departed. On this day the church remembers the "vast body of the faithful who, though no less members of the company of the redeemed, are unknown in the wider fellowship of the Church." For us, that means the people we name today, our family and friends to whom we are bound in love.

As you know, every week in the Prayers of the People we pray for people who have died, and we may also pray for the dead in our private prayers. Why? The catechism teaches that we pray for the dead "because we still hold them in our love, and because we trust that in God's presence those who have chosen to serve him will grow in his love, until they see him as he is"

(page 862). I suspect – though we won't know for sure until we die – that most of us will need to grow in love after we die, just as we need to grow in love before we die.

Putting all this together, what can we conclude about the Communion of Saints and what might we be called to do? The Communion of Saints is the huge and ever-growing company of souls bound together by love in Christ. In very real ways, death does not separate us from one another. There is a tie of prayer and of love among this company of people. How do we remain part of this community? In this morning's Collect we asked for God's "grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you." "Virtuous and godly living," living by God's way of love as Jesus taught and showed us, the best we can.

Our times are dark, and the world is full of hatred and violence and lies, greed and misuse of power. The church can be a beacon of light in dark times. We don't hide from the reality of the forces of darkness. After all, what could be darker than the cross of Christ? We bear witness to the reality of the darkness. But we uphold the light of Christ, for what light could be brighter than the light of his resurrection?

It is important that we are here to proclaim the message that the light of Christ is never overcome by darkness, never. It is important that we gather together to remember that there is another way to live, not the way of the world but the way of love. It is important that we celebrate the saints, people whose lives have shown the love of God which is in their hearts – to celebrate them and to be inspired by them.

This church is like our base camp where we are strengthened and renewed to go into the world to live in love and light, to stand up for God's kingdom, to be faithful witnesses of Christ. The darker the times and the harder it is to live with love for our neighbors, the more we need to be a strong witness to God's way of life. Jesus said to his followers, "You are the light of the world." We are all called to be people who allow the love of God to shine through us as unhindered and as clearly as we can – wherever, whenever, and however we can, today and every day.

I'm sure you know the song "When the Saints Go Marching In." "O Lord, I want to be in that number when the saints go marching in." Don't we all? We may have hope that we will indeed be in that number, hope founded on God's love and grace. As we read in the First Letter of John: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are… Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed" (1 John 3:1a, 2a).

It is good for us to be together to remember each year on All Saints' Day that we and those we love are, even now, members of the Communion of Saints. By God's grace, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and with the support of all faithful witnesses to the love of God in Christ, may we all be counted in the number of God's saints, "on the hallelujah day." Amen.