

## **Sunday 31st October – All Saints**

Led by Sue Nelms, LLM



### **Gathering and Greeting**

Grace, mercy and peace  
from God our Father  
and the Lord Jesus Christ  
be with you.

**And also with you.**

### **Opening Prayer**

God of light,  
you have called your saints in every age  
to live lives of transparent integrity,  
to be honest in their faults and failings,  
to be open in their weakness and vulnerability,  
that you all-sufficient grace may shine through them.  
Inspire us now to follow your saints in faith and hope.  
Shine through our living with your one true light,  
revealed in Jesus Christ your Son. **Amen.**

### **Hymn – Let Saints on Earth in Concert Sing**

- 1 Let saints on earth in concert sing  
with those whose work is done;  
for all the servants of our King  
in heaven and earth are one.
  
- 2 One family, we dwell in him,  
one church, above, beneath;  
though now divided by the stream,  
the narrow stream of death.

- 3 One army of the living God,  
to His command we bow:  
part of the host have crossed the flood,  
and part are crossing now.
- 4 E'en now to their eternal home  
there pass some spirits blest;  
while others to the margin come,  
waiting their call to rest.
- 5 Jesus, be thou our constant guide;  
then, when the word is given,  
bid Jordan's narrow stream divide  
and bring us safe to heaven.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

### **Meditation**

Let us pray for the peace and well-being of the whole Church.

*Silence is kept.*

Everlasting God, our maker and redeemer,  
grant us, with all the faithful departed,  
the sure benefits of your Son's saving passion and glorious  
resurrection,  
that, in the last day,  
when you gather up all things in Christ,  
we may with them enjoy the fullness of your promises;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

### **Confession**

We bring to God the heavy burdens of guilt and regret that we carry,  
the words and actions we wish we could undo.

**Let us lay aside every weight.  
Let us run with perseverance.**

We bring to God the times when we lose our motivation,  
times when we feel apathetic or lacking in energy.

**Let us lay aside every weight.  
Let us run with perseverance.**

We bring to God our lack of confidence,  
the times we do not believe in ourselves or our calling.

**Let us lay aside every weight.  
Let us run with perseverance.**

Lord Jesus,  
the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,  
as we turn to you and lay our burdens down,  
set us free from all guilt and regret,  
from all that undermines us,  
that we may run the race you have set before us,  
in the confidence of your calling,  
to be your saints.

**Amen.**

May the Father of all mercies  
cleanse us from our sins,  
and restore us in his image  
to the praise and glory of his name,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **Readings by Dona McCullagh**

### **Revelation 21.1-6a**

**21** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

‘See, the home of God is among mortals.  
He will dwell with them;  
they will be his peoples,  
and God himself will be with them;  
<sup>4</sup> he will wipe every tear from their eyes.  
Death will be no more;  
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,  
for the first things have passed away.’

<sup>5</sup> And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ <sup>6</sup> Then he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.’

### **John 11.32-44**

<sup>32</sup> When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’ <sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. <sup>34</sup> He said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ <sup>35</sup> Jesus began to weep. <sup>36</sup> So the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him!’ <sup>37</sup> But some of them said, ‘Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?’

<sup>38</sup> Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. <sup>39</sup> Jesus said, ‘Take away the stone.’ Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, ‘Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.’ <sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?’ <sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, ‘Father, I thank you for having heard me. <sup>42</sup> I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.’ <sup>43</sup> When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ <sup>44</sup> The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go.’

## Reflection by Rev Paul Garnell

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen+

“For all the saints, who from their labours rest, singing to Jesus, in their Sunday best!” As we would sing at my primary school, St Michael in the Omelette (Hamlet). And another, “Joshua fit the battle of (Jericho) Cherry Coke!” We would work hard at altering the lyrics to as many hymns as we could - simply to torment our music teachers and local priest. Perhaps some of you have similar stories to tell?

All Saints' Day is a Principal Festival, one of the nine great annual celebrations alongside Christmas Day, Easter Day, and Pentecost that the Church holds very special. I expect churches dedicated to 'All Saints' will be making a big deal of it but not down the road at Haslingfield, because instead, you should all be here at St Helen, Little Eversden! No brownie points to the Core Team member that missed that one, including me!

Did you know that the Oxford Dictionary of Saints lists over 1,000 of them – and that's by no means all of them, we might come up with barely a tenth of these if we put all our heads together. There are an awful lot of them, despite having been thinned down and regulated around the 12th or 13th century when it became only the Pope who could officially declare someone a Saint. For more than a thousand years before that, Saints were identified locally when someone came to attention as being exceptional. Exceptionally what? Exceptionally odd if you look at some of the accounts, especially as re-told in modern versions on the internet. Google 'strangest saints' and you get some bizarre stories. You could have hours of entertainment identifying the winners for the Guinness Book of Records type categories: the oddest Saint, the naughtiest Saint, the ugliest, the quietest, the most tortured ... yes, we could get into the Horrible Histories of Saints really easily. That's because they were, by and large, an odd, but saintly lot! They mainly started out no odder than us lot: which is only slightly odd, but something in every case happened to them that made them particularly aware of God and led them – enabled them – to do exceptional things because of their faith. The ability to pursue what they knew God to be calling them to do made them extra-ordinary. That ability came from

God, they were filled with what we call his grace; we can all experience God's grace at times but what marked out people as saints was that they were abundantly grace-filled people. That was the aspect that caused people around them to hold them in awe and wonder, to see the holiness in, or despite, the way they lived. It was the sort of holiness that shone out of them, that made their faces radiant and gets painted as halos on their heads in portraits.

A bit of history: The veneration of Saints started in the 2nd century with the tombs of martyrs as special places because people believed those who had gone to a violent death rather than deny their faith in Jesus were surely in heaven and would hear their prayers and help them. Then the Lives of Saints began to be written for edification: to instruct and encourage people by the example of their lives. Bede was a pioneer of this in the late seventh Century. By the sixteenth century the whole notion that Saints could ensure a route to heaven became big commercial business for the Church with a huge trade in relics - that is, bits of bone and other fragments supposedly of Saints - and with payment for prayers and Mass's. This was a compelling reason for Martin Luther to criticise the Church, that then contributed to the reform, the creation of the Protestant Church, and subsequent dismantling of shrines and the destruction of any images and statues of Saints - of the Roman Catholic Church - by Henry VIII. You can walk round many a parish church and cathedral today and see first-hand the empty recesses where saintly figures would have once been, or the faces of stone saints smashed - noses knocked off and eyes scratched out.

Memories of these events may, perhaps, still cause uneasiness in the Anglican Church if we get over-enthusiastic about Saints and their proper place in worship. As the Anglican Church we would say, clearly, that we believe Jesus is the one who hears our prayers, and we pray to and through him. That said, we would never want to under-estimate the value of the Saints as routes to God: by what they teach us about how to find God, how to worship and serve God, and speak to and about God. In the same bracket as Saints, we would include those leading figures of the Anglican Church that are not officially Saints (because the Anglican Church doesn't canonise Saints, that's still left to

the Pope) but are recognised by being given special commemoration days on which to thank God for them and acknowledge their contributions. In the Book of Common Prayer and some of the Common Worship Eucharistic prayers, the priest says, 'in the company of [N and] all the saints, may praise and glorify you forever, through Jesus Christ our Lord;' So, we acknowledge that we are in the company of the saints, living (I believe), in heaven, as we are in earth. The bracketed section allows for local custom and the priest to include either Our Lady, the name of the patron of the church, so St Helen in this case, continuing with 'and all the saints,'.

Today is All Saints Day, and it's the day to thank God for All Saints' and acknowledge their contribution to our Church life and also to our personal lives. I wonder how many of us have been inspired by the stories or writings of Saints? My confirmation saint is St Francis, and the group I was a member of at Theological College was named St Jude – the patron saint of lost causes – those facing difficult and impossible situations. Well, by the very fact I am stood here today clearly indicates that he wasn't sleeping on the job!

There is another primary reason why we celebrate and remember the Saints this Sunday, and it's reflected in the readings chosen for the day. The themes of being given new life: like Lazarus, raised from the dead as Jesus' demonstration that he was bringing the gift of resurrection to all who believe in him. Lazarus was only given new human-length life: he died in due course, as will we all, temporarily – and he is / was, a demonstration of how, one day, Jesus promises to raise all believers to a new eternal life. Something similar to the sort of resurrection he, Jesus, experienced which will likewise occur for us.

Another glimpse of it is described in the vision John writes about in Revelation of a new heaven and a new earth – 'Death will be no more ... See, I am making all things new.'

The Saints are a key part of this. They and all those who have died in the faith are part of the growing band of faithful that have died but are not finished. They are accompanying us as we work through our lives. They are part of what are referred to as 'all the company of heaven', 'the cloud of witnesses'. Because their lives were lived in a way that was extreme, because their vision and knowledge of God was so all-

consuming, in the fullness of their believing, they help us see the glory of God. That can really change our lives, make us new people, transform us by drawing us deep into the mystery of Christ and making us aware of how differently we want to live our lives when we live them for Him.

St Ignatius is a great example of someone whose life was changed by reading the Lives of Saints. He completely abandoned his affluent lifestyle of drinking and womanising to choose one of poverty, prayer, and learning. Wanting to describe the steps he had taken to find God, and thereby guide others to finding God. He subsequently wrote one of the most important and influential religious works – the Spiritual Exercises – which are still very much in use today. Saints demonstrate that ordinary people – and sinners at that - can become extraordinarily grace-filled and through that, become new people. They live on in the words we use in worship, in famous prayers and writings, through the legacy of their actions. They have shaped our Church and our world, and will continue to do so, that is why we celebrate and thank God for them today.

‘From earth’s wide bounds, from ocean’s farthest coast,  
through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,  
singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Alleluia, alleluia’.  
Amen <><

## **Creed**

We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
**maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.**

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
**God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,**

begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father.  
**Through him all things were made.**

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,  
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,  
and was made man.  
**For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.**

On the third day he rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
**he ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.**

We believe in the Holy Spirit,  
**the Lord, the giver of life,**

who proceeds from the Father and the Son.  
**With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.**

He has spoken through the prophets.  
**We believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic Church.**

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
**We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

### **Prayers of Intercession led by Michaela McNeill**

Lord of the Sabbath, for most of us this is an ordinary Sunday, like many before and probably many to come. We're here because we normally come here, not necessarily because we're looking for something, or expecting very much. Take us now in our very

ordinariness, and shake up and pour us out, and make our hearts beat a little faster as we reach out in holy fascination to you ... (pause).

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of creation, we admit that sometimes we can miss the glory and the grandeur of your created world. We can walk through life with our senses turned off. Give us, we pray, the gift of caring contemplation, so that we may see all things shot through with your glory: the morning sun between the houses, the endless shades of darkness in an evening sky, the image of Christ in the face of a friend. And sometimes, let us see things that are so beautiful they almost make us afraid ... (pause).

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of the nations, we know that peace doesn't seem likely in Africa and Afghanistan. But in this world surprises constantly catch us out. The surprise of an entire political system collapsing before the freedom of the human spirit. The surprise of captives emerging from kidnap with their lives and hopes intact. The surprise of forgiveness, and a man who lays down his gun. So, Lord, we do dare to pray – bring peace into those countries that need it and base that peace on justice ... (pause).

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of our shared lives, we live too much for ourselves, islands of self-sufficiency in an ocean of needs; we fail to help the needy and we fail to receive their gifts. We fail to see beyond our own little world. Help us to venture out, to encounter others in their struggles and in their generosity. We bring to you now someone who is struggling, and someone we know who's celebrating. Help us to be aware of them, and help them to be aware of you ... (pause).

Lord of the ordinary, give us eyes to see the deep mystery of ordinary things, ears to hear your quiet thunder, hearts to stir the promise of resurrection. So transform our week ahead that we may constantly glimpse your glory and respond with joy. Reveal to us the

extraordinary depths of every ordinary moment, and in that moment, transfigure us ... (pause).

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of the journey, who calls us to be ministers of the gospel in our communities, that the light of your presence might be known in every place, raise up the churches of Hardwick and Dry Drayton, that they might be strengthened by your Spirit, and set ablaze with your love, through Jesus Christ we pray.

**Amen**

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

### **Collect**

God of holiness,  
your glory is proclaimed in every age:  
as we rejoice in the faith of your saints,  
inspire us to follow their example  
with boldness and joy;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.**

## Hymn – For All the Saints

- 1 For all the saints who from their labours rest,  
who thee by faith before the world confessed,  
Thy name, O Jesu, be for ever blest:  
Alleluia, alleluia!
- 2 Thou wast their rock, their fortress and their might;  
thou, Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight;  
thou in the darkness still their one true light:  
Alleluia, alleluia!
- 3 O blest communion, fellowship divine.  
we feebly struggle, they in glory shine;  
yet all are one in thee, for all are thine:  
Alleluia, alleluia!
- 4 But lo, there breaks a yet more glorious day:  
the saints triumphant rise in bright array;  
the King of Glory passes on his way!  
Alleluia, alleluia!
- 5 From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,  
through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,  
singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost:  
Alleluia, alleluia!

William W How (1823-1897) (CCLI 90590)

## Conclusion

May God, who kindled the fire of his love in the hearts of the saints,  
pour upon us the riches of his grace.

**Amen.**

May he give us joy in their fellowship  
and a share in their praises.

**Amen.**

May he strengthen us to follow them in the way of holiness  
and to come to the full radiance of glory.

**Amen.**

And the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be among us and remain with us always.

**Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,  
**In the name of Christ. Amen.**