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Church of the Holy Spirit
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All Saints/ All Souls Sunday

The Feasts being celebrated today are a combination of two distinct dates- All Saints was yesterday, and All Souls is today. Why is there a distinction between All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day? What does the distinction tell us about what the Church believes, and what those beliefs mean to its members?

Since today is officially All Souls' Day, let's begin with those. The Episcopal Church believes that all human beings have souls and bodies. The spiritual natures of human beings are fed and nurtured much as their physical natures, and it can be said that individuals are on spiritual journeys as unique as fingerprints. While no two people take the same spiritual journey, it is understood that all people are invited to participate in the life of the Church, or in other words, to explore their spiritual selves to encounter the love of God in a community of spiritual and corporal beings who are equally beloved by God who created them.

Everyone is part of God's beloved creation. Still, not all people are part of Christ's Church, because despite all human beings having both a spiritual and physical being, they are capable of being made members of the body of Christ, the Church; not all spiritual journeys lead to sacramental relationships with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

To be considered a saint, the only prerequisite is that an individual is in a relationship with others through sacrament, prayer, and praise. Any person who engages in the life of the Church by being baptized, participating in Holy Eucharist, or partaking in any other sacramental rite is included in the communion of saints.

A pew research study from 2020 reports that 5 years ago there were approximately 2.3

Billion Christians worldwide.[1] It would be logistically impossible to commemorate every single Christian as a saint, so instead, the Episcopal Church maintains a calendar published for public observances of feasts and fasts, recognizing and remembering those who have lived exemplary lives. Those who pursued their faith in ways that can act as an inspiration to others- this is why, over the course of the liturgical year, almost every day includes a commemoration of or celebration of those martyrs, teachers, preachers, missionaries, prophets, and more who dedicated their lives to the glory and honor of God

But those commemorated in the Lesser Feasts and Fasts are not by far the only saints. In our lives, those who lead by example, or show us what not to do, who taught us to pray, and who never crossed the threshold of a sanctuary after their 18th birthday, are remembered as saints. There are as many ways to embody one's faith as there are bodies that hold souls. So on this day, the lives of all the saints whose lives are closely linked to ours are remembered. Today is an opportunity to reflect not only on the impact others had on us, but also on the impact we have on others.

Christ- God's own son- lived and experienced pain, suffering, grief, and loss. We believe that, because of this, when God promises to eradicate these for us, it is out of love for us as Jesus Christ's siblings in baptism. All too often, mortal bodies are broken by illness, injured by accident, deteriorated by age, and destroyed by violence. So, too, is the hope that we hold the belief that God will comfort not only those who suffer, but also those who grieve the loss of loved ones, through death, distance, or division. To some, it is the ultimate reassurance to know that their eternal souls will continue in the nearer presence of God.

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[1] https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/06/09/how-the-global-religious-landscape-changed-from-2010-to-2020/pr_2025-06-09_global-religious-change_0-01/ Access

Generations after generations grieve, remember, and honor those who have walked this path before them. Recollecting the lives of loved ones, often overlooking individuals' shortcomings, and highlighting their exemplary behavior. Eulogies are so usually a list of accomplishments, awards, and achievements. Obituaries, however, do not often recognize those betrayed or injured, those owed apologies, amends, or those who were estranged. At the grave, alongside loved ones who celebrate the victories, are often victims of hatred and division. at

Each Christian is expected to consider the impact of their own thoughts, words, and deeds. Not as an abstract exercise or a hypothetical question. There is value in recognizing, confessing, and spending time, energy, and resources reconciling ourselves to those we hurt. It is easy to cast stones, hold grudges, and pass judgment on those who have done us harm, but it is not as easy to consider the impact of our actions on others.

In steps 8 and 9 of the 12-step recovery, folks are expected to make a list of individuals they harmed and, when doing so, not cause additional harm, offer amends. This work requires clarity about what one believes about oneself and how one chooses to live in the world.

In the Church, likewise, all are invited to confess sins committed against God and our neighbor. Through either the general confession or the sacramental rite of reconciliation, we confess our sins and receive God's absolution. While the world encourages people to seek punishment—disguised as justice —for the heinous acts committed against them. So it is when people reflect on their own sins that it can feel like judgment, because it takes intentional time, energy, and space to look not only at how the things we do and leave undone harm us, but also at how the things we do and leave others.

Sin separates people from the love of God, the love of neighbor, or the love of self. Considering this definition, Christians ought to spend time reflecting upon the separation each of us has created between others through deliberate action and inaction.

How does what is said and how something is said impact those who hear it?

How do the purchases made impact those who grow, make, or sell items?

How does the disposal of 'waste' affect the environment and future generations of plants, animals, and creatures?

What is the correlation between what Christians believe and how Christians act?

Who and what are harmed and disregarded, alongside who and what are loved and admired, require honest reflection. Not only upon how harm manifests in one's own body, mind, or spirit, and what needs to be done to alleviate suffering, but also recognizing that for every action there is a reaction in creation.

It is intentional that, as congregations gather for sacrament, prayer, and praise, liturgies often include a confession, an opportunity to repent of sins against God and neighbor publicly. Then a priest or bishop, on behalf of God, assures the people of absolution, which we believe has already been given. By greeting one another with a sign of peace —handshake, nod, wave, bow, kiss —whatever liturgical movement can be passed from person to person, there is a visual and corporal demonstration of God's love for us. Also, God is the reconciling force in our lives. Once reconciled one to another, and to God, all saints can receive the sacrament, the body and blood of Christ, which provides nourishment for our souls so that our thoughts, words, and actions may continue to reflect the knowledge and love of God that comes through believing in the power of sacrament, prayer, and praise.

The relationships we maintain matter. Relationships are not straightforward, and family dynamics can be messy. The Church is no different than any other family in that reality. In scripture, we are given sibling rivalry, embodied by Cain and Abel, complicated marriages like that of Abraham and Sarah, and even strained parent-child dynamics, such as Israel choosing Joseph as his favorite among 12 sons. The stories in scripture are not so different from modern family dramas. However, beyond stories are the real people who make up God's family, and their souls are reconciled to one another and made whole by God, who forgives out of God's infinite mercy, grace, and love.

Human beings, unlike God, have a limited capacity to forgive, which affects trust in others. God does not require those who are hurt to continue to be abused for reconciliation to happen. Anonymous groups teach that amends should only be made when they would not cause additional harm. The Church believes that God forgives first, so that we might forgive as well, if possible without harming ourselves or others.

When Jesus teaches the disciples to pray, he says they can be forgiven of their sins and trespasses. The Church continues to use The Lord's prayer to remind all the saints that harm caused to others, ourselves, and creation requires our attention, and ultimately God's forgiveness.

The blessing of communion with God. No act is unforgivable.

Those loved, healed, reconciled, and restored to wholeness in souls and bodies are sinners of Christ's redeeming and shall be called saints in the life to come. Christians are assured that God wipes away every tear, both those of loved ones and victims alike, at the grave.

God offers restoration, reconciliation, and remembrance to all souls. God welcomes all the baptized into the Church. Today we remember All Saints, recognize All Souls, profess the belief, and confess those times that each of us has gone astray.

These souls and bodies are ours to control - with free will comes great responsibility. Our journey continues with intention, reflection, and reconnection to those whom we see in the great cloud of witnesses. All who loved us, led us, and let us learn for ourselves the ways of justice, freedom, and peace, which all souls may come to know and all saints believe in through sacrament, prayer, and praise.

Amen