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Contents

- All Saints, Here and Hereafter
By Bishop Winfield Mott 1
- 2020 Synod..... 1
- Up And At 'Em
By Kimberly M. Vogel..... 3
- Welcome To Our Brave, New World
By Fr. Michael Penfield..... 4
- Upcoming Clericus 6



All Saints, Here and Hereafter

By Bishop Winfield Mott

“Spin” may be a new term for massaging information to make it conform to the image you want, but it’s not a new concept. One of the great festivals of Christianity has long been spun in a number of directions.

In Mexico, it is “the day of the dead,” when families gather at the cemetery to remember their loved ones. In the Roman Catholic Church, it is a major holiday, a day of “obligation” (when Catholics still had obligations and were required to attend Mass). In Scandinavia, it is a day to anticipate the joy of heavenly completion, with wonderful hymns attesting to John’s vision in Revelation. And in America, it is Halloween, a day of spooks and goblins, scary stuff and tricks or treats by little urchins.

Because the Puritan heritage of America scrubbed the church year and festivals, replacing them with the dour observance of the “Sabbath,” the

original concept of All Saints Day was sadly lost. Only the name, obscured, remained. “Halloween” is “Hallows Eve,” All Hallows being an English rendition of All Saints. Many conservative Protestants today, unaware of history, denounce the day’s celebration, thinking it a demonic occasion.

The day suffers further because it is a fixed day, November 1. The Sabbath culture of America decrees that Sunday is the day reserved for religion, other days being left free for the economic endeavors so important for Puritans, Calvinists, and Prosperity Gospel gurus alike. Weekday religious holidays, with the sole relatively recent exception of Christmas, are a tough sell. Even the many parishes named “All Saints” have trouble turning out a crowd for the occasion. Most churches cave to the culture in the interest of saving the holiday and observe the event on the nearest Sunday.



Upcoming Synod

The Missionary Diocese of All Saints will be holding their 2020 Synod in Ocean City, Maryland March 26, 27 and 28. This is an extremely important Synod. We will be electing a new Bishop Coadjutor who will be leading MDAS after Bishop Ilgenfritz retires. Therefore, we need to see as many as you as we can!

Additionally, the Anglican Convocation of the West will be holding their Meeting of the Convocation at the same time and the same location. Our meeting will be the morning of March 26. This means that those members of the Convocation who will be attending need to arrive by the evening of March 25.

The day has two distinct themes. One, following the Epistle lesson from Revelation, Chapter 7, emphasizes John's vision of the saints in heaven. The other, following the Gospel, is Jesus' statement of his ethics, the Beatitudes. These two themes are so central to Christianity that All Saints Day is arguably the most important Christian holiday other than the Easter cycle.

The Ten Commandments, as delivered by Moses and broken by everyone, have become seen as the expression of Christian belief. When controversy arises over their display in a public place, both opponents and proponents accept that they are a basic Christian symbol. They are not. They are a Jewish statement. Both Jesus and Paul see them as God's rule, with

Christ's atonement on the Cross.

The Epistle for the day portrays that scene. A vast multitude has arrived. They are from all nations, ethnicities, languages, all permutations of human society, and from all times and places. The Christian community transcends all human barriers. All means all. We travel together along the Beatitude road to terminate among the great host arrayed in white, without distinction. Those who prefer barriers might also prefer a different terminus, which I believe is available at your option (see C.S. Lewis' book, "The Great Divorce" for further details).

What John sees happening is a boisterous enormous liturgical worship service of absolution and thanksgiving.

The followers of Jesus on that Beatitude road are, in conclusion, told they can "rejoice and be exceedingly glad" (Matthew 5:12). And so this crowd appears to be.

At first, the two themes appear separate. One is our ethical guide for life here on earth as we try to respond to God's love by living a life pleasing to him and offered to him. The other is a portrait of life hereafter, a joyous victory celebration of the forgiven and redeemed.

But if a "liturgical worship service of absolution and thanksgiving" sounds a bit familiar, you are on to something. Thanksgiving in Greek is "Eucharist." John's whole vision was in fact during the Sunday Eucharist on Patmos (see Rev. 1:9-10). As the door to the heavenly Eucharist opens (Rev. 4:1),

the earthly Sunday on Patmos is united with the heavenly eighth day, the perpetual celebration of thanksgiving before the Throne. There is only one Eucharist in the history of the world, which we on earth join, "with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven" (BCP preface), every time we celebrate our Eucharist. The door to heaven opens and the blessed faithful on earth unite with the jubilant and victorious population in heaven.

I hope your own celebration of this hallowed day gives you great joy, a real treat, as you gather with your fellow faithful, in however humble a scene it may be, to enter through the door of the blessed Kingdom, now for a moment, but finally in victory forever. We are blessed, indeed.



Photo by John Stockwell

which we are absolutely unable to conform. Therefore, while they are a useful guide for civil law, their Christian purpose is to show that we are lost, unable to save ourselves and dependent completely on the grace of God.

In contrast, the Beatitudes are specifically Christian. Jesus states them as goals, not laws, not "thou shalt" but "blessed are you if you can." They provide a life of grace, not condemnation, just as Jesus is sent not "to condemn the world but to save the world through him" (John 3:17). Christians are free from living according to rules, living instead in response to God's love, with the Beatitudes as our guide. Since all the baptized are saints, All Saints Day is specifically our day. The Beatitudes are the sinner's guide, until we stand on the last day before the Throne of God, our saintliness achieved for us through the covering of



Up And At 'Em

By Kimberly M. Vogel
St. Luke's Chapel in the Hills
Los Altos Hills, California

I was praying before the worship service began recently when the Holy Spirit nudged me and reminded me of a certain practice I wanted to add to my daily routine. Considering my calendar, I thought, "Well, it's not too long until Advent. I can start on the first day of the liturgical new year." That's when God stopped nudging and impaled me on His living and powerful Word: "Behold, now is the acceptable time."

You likely also have something you've been planning to

add to your quiet time. Perhaps you've also been looking for that right time to begin. I know — you're not saying no, just I'm not ready. But that is only one of the wonderful things about God! He doesn't need or even want us to be in a certain mental or physical place before He can use us, reform us, or make us grow. He just needs us to be willing. Now is the acceptable time, so let's stop planning and get busy doing.



Welcome to our brave, new world.

By Vicar-General Michael Penfield

While vacationing this summer, I had the “pleasure” of seeing a sight that both amused and shocked me. Four young (twenty-something) Japanese tourists were sitting at a table next to mine, eating. The two young ladies both sat together on one side, and the two young men sat on the other. Each person pulled out either a phone or a tablet and proceeded to view videos or play games. They never spoke to each other the entire time they dined together except when they had something on their respective electronic device that they needed to share. The women completed their meals and left. The men waited for their take-out order, playing their video games, and then they left.

On another occasion, I was dining with friends in San Jose. I excused myself to use the restroom, but on my way I passed the sushi bar. A young couple, with their infant daughter, was dining there. The daughter was in a stroller and looked to be not much older than one. As I passed I noticed that the father was holding up his phone in front of his mesmerized daughter. The phone was playing some sort of animated movie, though I believe the sound was turned down. While they did this, the father and mother ate their dinner.

Additionally I read in the Wall Street Journal that twenty-five percent of people on anti-depressants have been on the drug for a decade or more. Even more troubling is that many of their doctors never discussed with their patients weaning

themselves off the drug. The doctors seem content to just renew the prescription without a thought of whether it was still necessary.

Now, do not get me wrong; there are people who legitimately need anti-depressants and may need them for their entire life. But there are some who start taking anti-depressants when they are going through a rough patch, and just seem to remain on them. I had a friend that, after he lost his mother and father, was rightly depressed. His doctor started writing him a prescription without even asking if my friend needed it. He told the doctor to stop. He knew how to deal with his depression and did. But, a lot of people take these drugs, and then there is no reconsideration of whether it should be continued or when it should be stopped. Additionally and equally troubling, this same article reported that there has never been a scientific long-term study of the side effects of these drugs that considers their use beyond two years.

Welcome to our brave, new world.

This is our society. This is where and when we have to preach the Gospel of our Lord. This is where we have to tell them that God loves them, and that He proved this love through the ultimate act of self-sacrifice. And it is not easy.

I have heard commentators complain that our society, if not openly, has become, in a subtle way, hostile to Chris-

tianity. And some have pointed to this fact as a reason it has become harder to preserve the faith yet alone evangelize. But this situation is not new for our faith, even if it is new for our society. Christianity has existed and even prospered in some of the most hostile environments and times in our history.

However, unlike in the past, it seems hard to evangelize when so many are either distracted or medicated or both. As Bishop Mott is fond of saying, our mission is to be one beggar telling another beggar where they can find bread – in fact, the Bread of Life. But how can you tell them where to get the bread when they don't even know they are starving to death?

When people are so highly distracted, when they fritter away their free time with mind-numbing entertainment, how can they have time to think, to ponder, or to even feel? And when they do feel bad or depressed, how can they grasp what they are missing or needing if they are medicated out of their feelings?

And I can go on, but it is useless. It is useless not because it is futile but rather because it really doesn't matter. Our mission is the same as Jesus' original disciples, no matter what our society may be like.

The only reason that I bring up these things is that, even though our mission remains the same, the conditions have changed. And I have heard a lot of discouraged saints bemoaning this fact. Things have changed in our society, but our mission is and shall always remain the same. And it is our duty NOT to become discouraged – and no, no medication is needed.

The first thing we have to realize is that, it is not about us. A lot of good Christians seem to forget this fact. There are those Christians who are getting discouraged because they do not seem to be able to convince others. There are others who, because they have a large following, get very puffed up with pride in the mistaken belief that it is they who have reached many. But who is reached and who is not is really in God's hands, not ours.

This does not mean we do not try to reach an unbelieving world. On the contrary, we are. That IS our Commission. Additionally, this does not mean that we are not to employ ways of reaching the un-churched or the de-churched that seem to work. We are. However, it does mean that ultimately we must give credit where credit resides – God.

Also, do not forget that Jesus recognized the fact that there would be those who did not understand. In fact, He often taught in parables to separate those who had an open heart from those whose hearts were hardened. Isaiah warns us:

“So [the Lord] said, ‘Go, and tell this people, “You shall hear indeed, but not understand: and you shall see indeed, but not perceive.” For the heart of this people has become insensitive and their ears hear with difficulty. They have closed their eyes, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return, and I should heal them.” [Isaiah 6:9-10]

Jesus Himself quotes this passage when He explains to the Apostles the meaning of the Parable of the Sower. And this is the parable of which I wish to remind us all. Although he is Jesus, the sower is also we. And we need to remind ourselves that how the Word is received is not about our egos, our pride, or us:

“Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” [Mathew 13:3-9]

In this parable, Jesus is telling us that we are not going to be successful most times. Between the devil on the one hand and the cares of this world on the other, many will hear, but few will believe. Yet, we are still commanded to preach the Gospel. We are still commanded to sow the seed. And we are to spread the seed everywhere, regardless of whether we think it will take root.

Even though the reception of the Word in the hearts of believers is in God's hands, we are still to try. The success may not be ours, but the effort is. Therefore, we have this lesson from Saint Paul:

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; ... I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some. Now, this I do for the gospel's sake that I may be partaker of it with you. [1 Corinthians 9:19, 22-23]

I do not believe that Saint Paul is asking us to be hypocritical or disingenuous. Rather, I think he is echoing what Jesus has told us when He said we are to be as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves. I believe Saint Paul is telling us to meet people where they are and relate to them. This is what I wrote earlier: we are to speak to people in a way that they will understand. And we are to relate to them as best we can, including in our capacity as servants of the Lord and of each other. This means understanding them and relating to them in a way that is meaningful.

So, in a very round about way, I am saying that we are not to be discouraged. We are not to allow our worries about the sorry state of our world to discourage us from spreading the Gospel. We are not to let all the beggars who are so distracted go hungry. We are not to let any doomsday naysayer stop us from telling them where to find bread. And if we do not let this world get us down, maybe the good Lord can use us to evangelize this increasingly polarized, distracted, medicated society we live in today.

Amen.

THE CLOSING VIEW

The peaceful Mesilla Valley, New Mexico, as seen from above on the Hayner Ruby Mine road.

Photo by Samat K. Jain



The Holy Cross Retreat Center in Mesilla, New Mexico

Upcoming Clericus 2020

The Anglican Convocation of the West will be holding their annual Clericus in Mesilla, New Mexico, February 18, 19 and 20. We are providing this early notice because, originally, we discussed holding the Clericus this October in order not to interfere with the Diocesan Synod. However, a lot of the clergy found this too difficult and our guest speaker could not be with us then.

Our guest speaker will be the Reverend Canon Mark Eldredge. Canon Eldredge will be speaking on church revitalization. We will have more information for you on this later.