

All Saints' Day Sunday  
Christ and Grace

John 11:32-44  
November 4, 2018

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This past Wednesday was Halloween. A little boy who looked to be about four years old came to our door wearing a Superman costume. As I opened the door, this little super hero reached out his hand and said, "trick or treat!" I noticed he did not have a bag and I asked him, "don't you have a bag for your treats?" He told me that his mom was carrying it because it was too heavy. "But you're Superman!" I said. Then he looked down at the S on his shirt and then back up at me and whispered, "Not really... these are just pajamas!"

Even though scripture tells us that as Christians we are saints, we don't always believe it. If S stands for saint, we too often doubt that we truly deserve to be called saints, to wear the shirt. Perhaps Martin Luther got it right when he said we are both saint and sinner at the same time. We don't go around labeled with a big S, but we do have an invisible cross on our foreheads. It is put there at our baptism as we are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever. This mark reminds us that we are called. Called into the waters of baptism and called into a life of sainthood. We are called to continually try to live into our name as children of God, as baptized saints.

Today we honor saints past, present and future. We remember our loved ones who have died this past year, and we recall those famous saints throughout history whose stories inspire us. All Saints' Day is on the short list of Principal Feasts like Christmas, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, Trinity Sunday and The Epiphany. It's a feast day for all the saints! We often think about saints as heroic people from long ago, perfect people who end up in stained glass windows or have churches named after them. As we just learned in our adult formation time, in the early Church all Christians were called saints. We may not always be a good or obedient saint, but we are set apart for God's work, by our baptism. And just as God's work continues in saints today, the miracle in today's Gospel is not simply a long ago miracle just for Lazarus, but is true for us here and now.

Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, were close friends with Jesus. In fact, they were like an adopted family for Jesus. When Lazarus became ill, the sisters sent a message to Jesus saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." When Jesus finally arrived, Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. Martha ran to meet Jesus complaining that if he had only been there, her brother would not have died. And this is where Jesus says those beautiful words of truth and promise to Martha, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." And then Martha's faith was renewed and she proclaimed, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." Soon after, Mary arrived, and this is where our Gospel reading for today picks up the story.

Mary knelt at the feet of Jesus and wept, saying, "Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died." And when Jesus saw Mary and the others weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved, and Jesus began to weep. And then, Jesus told them to take away the stone blocking the entrance to the tomb. But the reality was that Lazarus was dead. Four days dead. And while we don't read the King James Version very often these days, it is that

translation that probably best expresses the reality of the situation. Everyone knew that rolling away that stone was a bad idea, and Martha called out, in her best King James English, “But Lord, he stinketh!” That was the truth. But then Jesus reminded them of another truth – that if they believed, they would see the glory of God. So they took away the stone, Jesus prayed to his Father and then cried out, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands, feet, and face bound with cloth. This story is so graphic we can see it, we can almost smell it.

But this story is not just about Lazarus. It’s about us. Because we are all Lazarus. We all have times when we find ourselves dead and lifeless, all wrapped up in grave clothes, bound by the grief of our lives, or the despair of the world around us, we are as good as dead, and we stinketh!

But Jesus does not call only Lazarus, Jesus calls each one of us out of our tombs. As the community of the baptized, as saints, we are still like Lazarus from time to time, trapped in tombs of anger, self-righteousness, or partisan thinking. We can all think of those things that bind us. Can we just admit that sometimes we stinketh?<sup>1</sup>

Even so, Jesus does not stop calling us - because he loves us. We are his adopted family. We entered the waters of baptism to be made clean, to be made saints, and we are reminded of that each time we renew our baptismal covenant. Martin Luther was right – we are both saints and sinners. But we are marked as Christ’s own forever and every time we shut ourselves up in a tomb, Jesus will come and call for us to come out. He calls us to try again to be the saints that we are.

In a few minutes, we will renew our baptismal vows, which remind us what life in Christ is to look like. We do not live this life on our own, but only in the power of the Resurrection, in the power of the one who left the tomb, in the power of the one who calls us forth from our own tombs to continue in the risen life of Christ.

Today there is water in the baptismal font. It’s been blessed and it’s there to remind us of our baptism. As you come up for communion, or as you leave worship, take a moment by the font and remember that you have been cleansed from sin and marked as Christ’s own forever. Touch the water, make the sign of the cross if you like.

We cannot be Christians by ourselves. We need the love, support, and encouragement of all these saints around us, our adopted family. It’s the community that helps to unbind us. Sometimes the bags of life that we carry get too heavy, even for Superman. We may not have Superman pajamas, but we do have an indelible cross on our foreheads to remind us of the power of God in us. And we have the communion of saints always with us, helping us carry the weight of this world, and unbinding us from all despair, that we might see the glory of God.

Let us pray. Almighty God, by your Holy Spirit you have made us one with your saints in heaven and on earth: Grant that in our earthly pilgrimage we may always be supported by this fellowship of love and prayer, and know ourselves to be surrounded by their witness to your

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<sup>1</sup> Rick Morley, rickmorley.com archives 2025

power and mercy. We ask this for the sake of Jesus Christ, in whom all our intercessions are acceptable through the Spirit, and who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Common of a Saint III, *Holy Women Holy Men, Celebrating the Saints*, page 726.