

**All Saints Sunday** (4 before Advent)  
*St Mary the Virgin, St Briavels, and St Mary Magdalene,  
Hewelsfield, 2023*

*1 John 3:1-3*  
*Matthew 5: 1-12*

‘Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed.’

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

We arrive at the great Feast of All Saints. As you probably know the feast of All Saints actually falls on 1 November, which was last Wednesday, which is of course why the secular or occult festival of Halloween was on Tuesday night: All Hallows Eve. And then on Thursday, we kept the commemoration of All Souls, and those two feasts: All Saints and All Souls fit together like two sides of the same coin. And like many parishes we are keeping both of those special days today, on the nearest Sunday. And I do commend to you the All Souls’ service this evening at Tidenham Chase, perhaps particularly if you are carrying a recent bereavement. It is a beautiful and important service, and it’s at 4 o’clock.

The message of today is that we are not alone. The message of the Saints is that we are not alone. As you know, some Christian traditions make a great deal of the saints, observing every Saint’s day in the calendar, and if you are into that sort of thing there is almost a Saint for every day of the year, so you can collect them as you go along like stamps or whatever. The particular Saint for me and Emma is Allen Gardiner, missionary to Latin America, because we got married on his feast day. And actually today is a great feast day for the Anglican Order of

Cistercians, because today is the Feast of our Lady of Hailes, and that’s because the great Cistercian Abbey in Hailes, just an hour or so up the road from here outside Winchcombe was dedicated on 5 November, and dedicated, as all Cistercian Abbeys are, to the Blessed Virgin Mary. And we have our own Patronal Saints as well, of course the Blessed Virgin for St Briavels, and Mary Magdalene for Hewelsfield, and I preached on Patronal Saints earlier this year.

But whether we like the idea of the saints, and think about them quite a lot, or whether they are really not part of our regular spirituality, what does Holy Mother Church want us to learn from *this* day, where we remember this morning *All* the Saints - the great men and women like Mary Magdalene, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Peter, Luke, Michael and all the others from the Bible, as well as thousands of other men, women and children who the church has marked out as particular examples; and then this evening when we remember our own beloved ones, those who the church hasn’t particularly noticed, but whose lives have touched ours and hallowed them, and changed them?

Well I think that those three short verses from the first Epistle of St John, that we heard a few moments ago, give us the answer, and I also think that they are possibly amongst the most positive and encouraging verses in the whole of Scripture. Let me just read from them again:

‘See what love the Father has given us, 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. What we do know is this; when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.’

We are not alone. First important message of All Saints Day. See what love the Father has given us. We are loved. We are not alone.

And how are we not alone? Because we are God's children now. What an extraordinarily strong, powerful, and hopeful sentence. We are God's children now.

But we are also on our way to somewhere else. We are journeying towards seeing God, and being like him. And that's mysterious, and we don't really understand exactly what that means. But that's okay, because St John didn't know either, which is why he wrote, 'what we will be has not yet been revealed'. The future is mysterious. Heaven is mysterious. Judgement is mysterious. But - and this becomes really important this evening when, if you go to that service, we will be particularly remembering our own love ones who have died, either recently or in years past - although the future, and judgement, and heaven are mysterious, we do know that what is there is God, and when we get there we will be like God. And that means that we can look into the future with hope. That's how St John finishes that little passage we heard this morning. We can have hope.

So we are not alone. Do remember that little line from the Book of Common Prayer communion service: 'let us pray for the whole state of Christ's church militant here in earth'? What a lot of people forget is that the church militant is only a part of the church. That phrase means 'let us pray for the alive Christians wandering about on the top of the Earth right now'. But that is not all that the church is. There is the Church Triumphant - the saints in glory, the Angels and archangels, already in God's nearer presence. And there is the Church Expectant, all our loved ones who have died before us, and who have been commended to God in the hope of a glorious resurrection. And

all of that constitutes the Church. Though normally can only see glimpses of the kingdom of heaven, and we cling with hope to the promise of seeing those whom we have loved and lost again. But we can do so with confidence, because we are God's children now, and we move forward into the mystery of the future surrounded by the Saints, whose example can encourage us.

And perhaps that can give us some direction in an ever darkening world. Last time I was with you Ukraine was still the headline. Now it is Gaza. We are likely to be celebrating Christmas this year with a war going on in the Holy Land, and a seemingly intractable conflict between Israel and Palestine, in which nuance and conversation seem a very long way away from the polarised statements on the news.

And maybe prayer feels a bit hopeless. But it really isn't. And actually it is one thing that every one of us can do, because we are God's children now. Because we know that nothing is hopeless. The language we use today is pretty close to the language we use at a Christian funeral service. Where we have to acknowledge the pain, and brokenness and grief and what feels often like despair - but what do we say when we bury a Christian? 'In sure and certain hope of the resurrection from the dead of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

And that's the hope we claim today. We place ourselves firmly inside that sure and certain hope, and we say to the darkness, 'I beg to differ'. There are saints here. There are angels here. We are God's children *now*. And as for the future? Well, there are lots of things about it that we do not know; but what we do know is this: we will be like God, because we will see him as he is, as we take our place in the heavenly choir with all the saints. Amen.