

Devotions for the Week of All Saints – November 3-7, 2025

Monday of All Saints – Prayer of the Week

Almighty and everlasting God, You knit together Your faithful people of all times and places into one holy communion, the mystical body of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Grant us so to follow Your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living that, together with them, we may come to the unspeakable joys You have prepared for those who love You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

My grandmother was a woman of extraordinary skills, not necessarily the skills people appreciate today, but skills, nonetheless. I believe that in another time/place she might have excelled at mathematics. She could hold complicated patterns in her head. People would bring her a piece of torn lace, and she could fix it. Making lace involves a complicated interplay of threads to create intricate patterns in which people delight. She was able to look at a piece of lace and understand the pattern. She kept a vast collection of thread in her home and could often match dye lots. It was said that when she handed the piece back to you, you could not tell where the tear had been, it was like new.

The prayer says that God knits us together. In complicated relationships and mystical bonds, God has united all his people of every time and place into one people. As we have celebrated All Saints Day many of us might have come to this day mourning the passing of a friend, a sibling, a parent, a child, or a spouse. I read this prayer and immediately thought of my grandmother with her knitting needles in hand, clacking in the corner of her home. She could also knit very fast while talking even faster.

Today I count on those bonds. My grandmother died some years ago, a life well lived and full of years, leaving a ragged, painful hole in the lives of the folks who loved her. Yet, when I come to the sacrament of the altar and partake of that feast, I am eating with her and all my loved ones who have been gathered into Jesus' arms. Many parishes have a communion rail, often a semi-circular place for us to kneel at the altar as we receive the sacrament. I often like to imagine that the railing continues all the way around the altar. On the other side, a side which I can see only with eyes of faith, kneels my grandparents, parents, and many others whose absence I feel and whose presence I long for.

Tuesday of All Saints – Revelation 7:2-17

²Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, ³saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." ⁴And I heard the number of the sealed,

144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

⁵12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed, 12,000 from the tribe of Reuben, 12,000 from the tribe of Gad, ⁶12,000 from the tribe of Asher, 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh, ⁷12,000 from the tribe of Simeon, 12,000 from the tribe of Levi, 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar, ⁸12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.

⁹After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ¹¹And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

¹³Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" ¹⁴I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

¹⁵"Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.

¹⁷For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

My first parish out of the seminary was a small congregation on the north side of Salt Lake City. The community was dominated by LDS churches. Something like 92% of the population were LDS and many of them were ardently LDS. We had a small youth group, about 5 teens. While being in high school is always a bit of a challenge, in that context it could be doubly difficult. My parish raised the funds and sent this little group to the LCMS National Youth Gathering. It was one of the best things we ever did for them. The programing was great, and the week spent in service, worship, and play was excellent. But what truly made the difference was the first night and walking in a stadium filled with nearly 30,000 young Lutherans.

I had taught all these young people in confirmation class. We had spoken about the fact that the Christian church was far larger than the LDS church. But they really could not internalize that. For those who grew up in that community, they had been a tiny minority in every neighborhood and classroom they had ever experienced. I remember one young man standing in awe at the

entrance to the arena seating area. He looked at me and asked, “Who are all these people?” I told him they were all Lutherans, like him. He spent the next five days getting his head around that. He had no idea that there were so many Lutheran young people. I think he went back to school that fall feeling differently.

Survivors of persecution have told me that the final goal of the evil one is to cause you to lose hope. The devil wants nothing more than to cause the Christian to believe that God has forgotten about you, that you are alone, the last one, a dying minority, insignificant and inconsequential. I do not think that is only in places and times of persecution. The devil works that same despair in many ways. Do you look around your parish on a Sunday morning and feel some of it? You might think that there was a time when this parish needed this big building, but now its pews are mostly empty. Perhaps your church is full. Praise God! That is not true for most Christian churches in North America. This sense of being alone has only been exacerbated by the pandemic. Even now that services are allowed, some elect not to come because they are especially vulnerable. It is easy for the Christian to feel discouraged and isolated.

Look at verse 9 in this reading again. The author was exiled to Patmos, in a cave, all alone. It must have been glorious for him to see that vision of a mighty, innumerable host. This is the reason God is sharing it with you: you need to see it too. You need that experience of that young man standing in the arena in San Antonio many years ago. You are part of a great and mighty host. You are gathered around the throne and the Lamb every Sunday.

Wednesday of All Saints – Psalm 149

- ¹ Praise the LORD!
Sing to the LORD a new song,
his praise in the assembly of the godly!
- ² Let Israel be glad in his Maker;
let the children of Zion rejoice in their King!
- ³ Let them praise his name with dancing,
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!
- ⁴ For the LORD takes pleasure in his people;
he adorns the humble with salvation.
- ⁵ Let the godly exult in glory;
let them sing for joy on their beds.
- ⁶ Let the high praises of God be in their throats
and two-edged swords in their hands,
- ⁷ to execute vengeance on the nations
and punishments on the peoples,
- ⁸ to bind their kings with chains
and their nobles with fetters of iron,
- ⁹ to execute on them the judgment written!

This is honor for all his godly ones.
Praise the LORD!

Did you notice the hard-left turn in verse 6? The first 5 verses are a cheerful admonition to the people of God to praise him for the Lord's pleasure in the people and his salvation of the humble. Children are dancing and people are making music. It sounds like a parade or a festival. Even the invalids can get in the act as praises are called for from those godly who lie on their beds.

But then, in the second half of verse 6, the psalm suddenly changes. The people praising God have two-edged swords in their hands. They are executing vengeance on the nations and punishment on peoples. Kings and nobles are imprisoned and shackled. God's foreordained judgment is visited upon them. After that, the "hallelujah" at the end of the psalm sounds different.

The Christian does well who remembers that he or she holds a dual citizenship. There will be a day when your U. S. passport will be meaningless; your baptismal certificate will be critically important. On that day we will be completely subject to a wholly other system of justice. There is much to say about the relationship between the eternal and earthly justice. For now, the psalmist would make a very important point about that other, divine justice for you. The joy of the humble, the children, and the saints of God in the first part of the psalm is connected to the justice in the second. God renders his justice for your sake. He tells the nations who stand before him in the judgment, "If you gave a cup of cold water to the least of these my brothers, you gave it to me." Wise is the Christian who lives in that justice, who lets God take his vengeance in his time, and who knows that Jesus sees and knows everything that happens to him or her.

Thursday of All Saints – 1 John 3:1-3

¹See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

I have lived for more than five decades in the embrace of Lutheran parishes. In this week of All Saints I have a particular gallery of faces and names that run through my head. You likely have a similar gallery. Inez, Margaret, Dorothy, Dave, Pat, Joanne, Neal, Herb, Melvin, and Gordon, just to name a few. It is quite the group. There are PhD's and high school dropouts in there. Some had acid tongues and others were gentle souls who had endured great hardships. Many of them are with Jesus, some still are like me "working out their salvation with fear and trembling" as Paul said.

To all of them the Father has given his love and they are called children of God. The world scoffs and denies this claim. They are not holy or perfect people. Indeed, they were each critically flawed in their own ways. Sin had broken them and eventually worked its death. The world only sees that and, as a result, cannot accept that they are children of God.

But the world and we ourselves are in for something of a surprise. Our true natures have not been revealed. That true nature was created in our baptism and now it often is obscured by the old man, the old creation which sin has so distorted. But make no mistake. Baptism did in fact create something new. Death shall wipe that old nature away. From our graves shall arise only the new which God has carefully nurtured throughout these days of our pilgrimage.

Did you notice that John says Jesus “appears?” He does not say that Jesus comes. Jesus is here the whole time, but we might not always see him. Likewise, this hidden nature of the Christian. It is there, in communion with this present Christ. Indeed, Christ is present within that nature. Read Galatians 2:20 and take it seriously. It is not I who live but it is Christ who lives in me. On that last day the veil will be lifted and all shall see him and all shall see us as we really are, the brightly-shining children of God. Everyone who has this hope in Christ is pure, for Christ who lives in us is pure.

Friday of All Saints – Matthew 5:1-12

¹Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

²And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

I heard a fascinating little story on the radio the other day. It was told by a man who was reflecting on his childhood in Portland. His mom had fled with him and his 4 yr. old sister from an abusive relationship. He spent the bulk of his 6th grade year homeless. They had a routine. The school had a program which served breakfast. You could get a shower at the local community center. They knew when the police checked the parks, and they would be waiting with their gear in a shopping cart for the officer to complete his round at 6 PM and they would dash in. They had a favorite conifer in a park not far from my home whose branches came down to the ground and formed a dry and safe place. Under its branches he said he started to feel like he could relax.

I drive by that park quite often. I have likely seen the tree under which he, his mom and little sister slept. He felt blessed there, he said. It is a different definition of blessing than I am used to. Jesus looks out over the crowds of people and notes all the different types. Over each of them he pronounces a blessing. Somewhere in that list you can find yourself. Perhaps you are hungering and thirsting for a righteousness you cannot perceive in your life. Perhaps you are meek and feeling like the world's doormat. Perhaps you mourn or are impoverished in spirit. Jesus has one word for all of us – blessed.

Eventually the story teller's mom was able to secure a place to live. His life started to look a lot more like my idea of blessed. Today he operates a non-profit that helps young minority men complete school. There was a day, though, when he was 12, that a pine tree whose branches reached all the way to the ground was a blessing. As Jesus starts the Sermon on the Mount he speaks of blessings for all sorts of people. They each look a little different, but he blesses. When the sermon is over, Jesus walks down the hill and immediately encounters a leper, a man isolated by his disease, an isolation far more rigorously observed than any COVID quarantine. The leper asks Jesus to cleanse him and Jesus does something remarkable. He touches the leper. Yes, he cleanses him of his dreadful disease, but he sees a man who has been utterly cut off from human contact by his disease. He touches him. Jesus is a blessing to all. Jesus is a blessing to you.