"As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the LORD, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority." Colossians 2:6-10.

Dear Christian friends,

November within the Church is a time of great exhortation and encouragement. The month opens with the celebration of All Saints – a time of remembrance and thanksgiving for those blessed men and women who have died fully committed and living in the Christian faith; having exemplified the best of Jesus in their living. Later in the month is the celebration of Christ the King – a time of anticipation that proclaims Christ's sovereign return and the final judgment. Both of these celebrations focus upon the best that life in Christ means for us and for the world.

We live our Christian faith connected to the "saints" through our union in baptism to the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. Christ is our common foundation and the only One upon whom our hope can be built; and the only One who should be lord in our life. The event of our baptism makes us disciples for Jesus in the world. Living the fullness of our baptism through our words and actions is a sharing of the Gospel of Christ Jesus.

Over recent months within our province there has been much discussion, particularly about immigrants, that can be very divisive. I experience this divergence of opinion within my greater family. The one issue that troubles me is the degree to which immigrants are being "blamed" for many of the social problems here: health care, education, employment, etc. I have a great concern for current immigrants and how they may perceive our "welcome" to them. I believe many of them come hoping for better things in their lives. How do we accept or receive their presence and gifts?

I know that most of my ancestors came to western Canada as economic immigrants, whether from Europe or the United States. Those who came from Europe in the late 1800s were provided with free transportation here. The nation wanted people to fill the millions of acres of land and people were needed to make that economic potential become real. (Without the provision of free transportation, many European families could not afford to immigrate in that era.) Even Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR) was formed in 1948 to assist the thousands of European Lutherans wanting to escape the ravages and turmoil that war had created in their homelands. CLWR tirelessly worked to find sponsorships, housing, employment and settlement services for those immigrants. Most immigrants settled or were settled among their own ethnic communities to assist the newcomers in adapting to a new home. My great-grandparents continued to speak their native European languages at home; they dressed in their accustomed ethnic clothing; they ate their native cuisine. Eventually they were able to become more assimilated to this new country. But assimilation did not happen immediately.

Today, I can attest to the vital role that many immigrants fill in our economy. Most long-term care centers could not function without immigrants willing to take that vital but menial employment. Probably 85% of the workforce on the new housing being built across from Shepherd King are non-Caucasian; without those workers' presence the large "hole-in-the-ground" would persist. And, as I have witnessed during funerals, they exhibit far greater respect for our customs than I have experienced among many Caucasians in our culture! How do we exhibit the presence of Christ to those newcomers?

As we celebrate the "true" saints, we know their earthly life exemplified the One to whom they belonged – Christ Jesus. They truly lived in the world without being wholly of the world. Their true identity was beyond what this realm can provide. They lived for that fulfillment to which we all strive, the Celebration of Christ the King. The saints are the Church Triumphant held securely in the bosom of Christ; we are the Church Militant struggling against the wiles of the devil, his designs and all his minions. We too should be in the world but not wholly of this world. Our true identity is hidden with Christ. God has made us as disciples of Jesus to be the very hands and feet of Jesus in our time. May the true Spirit of our LORD guide us in our words and actions, particularly toward our new neighbors – those immigrants who come to serve among us.

Live as saints, show hospitality to strangers (Hebrews 13:2) and look toward the true King of kings and LORD of lords – Christ Jesus the LORD, and our Savior.

In Christ forever,

Pastor Kevin