

## ALL SAINTS DAY John 11: 32-44

Earlier in John's gospel, just before today's reading, we read that Jesus hears of Lazarus' death. Jesus is in hiding and delays his arrival in Bethany. When he does arrive, he is confronted by Martha. I always imagine her battering Jesus' chest with her fists as she cries out 'If you had been here my brother would not have died'. The note of anger is unmistakable. Then she says: 'But I know that, even now, God will give you whatever you ask' (John 11.21-22). Jesus' response is not to go to the tomb and perform the miracle straight away. Instead, he listens to Martha and points her to a future horizon, saying 'Your brother *will* rise again' (John 11.23). 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day' is her response (John 11.24) but it seems cold comfort. She wants her brother back now. Jesus' response, '*I am* the resurrection and the life' (John 11.25) focuses the hope back from a general resurrection one day to trust in him. 'Trust me now – in the dark place' is what Jesus seems to be saying.

Now the stage is set for the actual passage set for today, All Saints' Day (John 11.32-44). The story tells of Lazarus' blinking and stumbling emergence from his four-day burial, trailing grave clothes. It tells too of Jesus' emotions, deeply moved, weeping. He calls to Lazarus, in a loud voice, with his name and two simple words: 'Lazarus, come out!'

Jesus has claimed to be, 'the resurrection and the life' and now he gives a demonstration of his power over life itself. The way in which Jesus is both unparalleled miracle worker, and yet also a moved and emotional human being, points to both sides of his identity as simultaneously God and human.

I wonder if his anxiety is perhaps not just natural grief at the death of his friend, but also an awareness that by coming out of hiding, and displaying the power he has at his command, Jesus is revealing unmistakably at last who he really is, that even death itself bows to his command. Jesus can no longer hide from his enemies.

It is clear that life for Lazarus is going to mean death for Jesus. Only by setting out on the path that will lead to the cross can Jesus bring life back to the grieving family at Bethany. To be truly 'the resurrection and the life' Jesus must go through death and come out the other side. Only by doing so is there a path of resurrection for others ultimately to follow.

On All Saints Day we celebrate this hope of resurrection and we celebrate those who have believed in it and followed in Jesus' footsteps. But most of all we celebrate the one whose sacrifice made resurrection possible. Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me, even if they die, will live; and everyone who lives and believes in me never dies. Do you believe this?' (John 11.25-26).

The question is not just for Mary and Martha, but for everyone. Do YOU believe this?

Today is All Saint's Sunday. But what makes a person a saint?

We might think of people for whom special days, hospitals and churches are named after. Maybe St. Paul, St. Luke, or St. Andrew. We might think of more recent people – people who have made significant contributions to our world, Martin Luther, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Oscar Romero. We might think of Mother Theresa of Calcutta. We might even include a grandmother or grandfather, aunt or uncle.

If we look in the scriptures for people whom we might consider saints, we might include in our list King David. He wrote so many wonderful Psalms that still give us hope today. He was a powerful leader of his people, leading them to follow the God of Israel, holding in front of them the covenant and promises of God. But we would also need to remember the incident with Bathsheba, the lust and adultery that led to murder. Then the idea of what makes a saint takes on a new dimension.

We might think of Peter, the faithful disciple, even with his ups and downs, his declarations of faith and his betrayals. He was the one who declared, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God", but he also denied Jesus three times saying, "I do not know him."

So, who are the saints? We are declared saints when we are baptised; and we are invited to live our lives in response to that fact. When you let your situation in life determine who you are, you will have great sorrow. But when you let God determine who you are, you will be greatly blessed. Who we are has already been determined – we are children of God, we are saints. When you let your poverty, your hunger, your sadness, or your lack of popularity be the final word about the meaning and significance of your life, you will indeed be in hopelessness and despair. But when you let the Kingdom of God have the final word about the meaning and significance of your life, you will have true joy.

As saints, we can even love our enemies, because we know it is God and not our enemies who have ultimate authority in our lives. We are blessed because we trust God above everything else.

We are saints, that fact is made real in baptism. A saint is not someone who by his or her own reason and strength has achieved greatness. When we are baptized into Jesus Christ, we are given a brand-new perspective on reality – a reality quite different than the reality of the world. The world tells us that only the rich, the self-satisfied, the happy, and the popular are those who are blessed. "Nonsense!" replies Jesus, "You are blessed because I say you are blessed. You are blessed no

matter what external conditions prevail in your life, because it is God, and not the world, with the final word about who you really are.”

That is the good news we share this day with all the saints on earth, and all the saints in heaven, with all the saints who have gone before us, and all the saints who will come after us. We rejoice this day in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. We rejoice that God has called us to sainthood and for having given us a totally new way of looking at life. We are truly blessed.

You are saints. When we celebrate All Saints Day, we are recognizing that all of us are saints in God’s sight through Christ. After all, it is not how we live that makes us saints, but how Christ lived for us, died for us and rose for us. Your Baptism into Christ makes you a saint.

So, does that mean that we can do whatever we want? Can we misbehave, or worse? Of course not! Knowing that Jesus died for us, that he promises forgiveness of all our sins and eternal life with him, this should make us change our lives.

This week I invite you to ask yourself this challenging question: ‘Is the life I am living worth the death Christ died?’

Today, Jesus says, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me, even if they die, will live; and everyone who lives and believes in me never dies. Do you believe this?’

As saints, let us celebrate and rejoice in this. And let us pray that, as we are reminded of how much God loves us, we will change our lives to reflect God’s love to all those that we meet. Amen.