



the NEW SHOFAR

Holy Holy Holy, Lord God Almighty

All Saints Day begins with baptism

The Church understands how baptism should be celebrated in the setting of the Christian community, generally within the context of the Sunday worship. The People of God (the Church) made present in the local community plays an important part in the baptism of the child/adult. The faith that is professed at baptism is not a private set of beliefs but represents the treasures of the whole of the Church of Christ. What is important is to understand that this community membership is not finished at death. In Christ it is a love and relationship that continues forever.

The Communion of Saints

This fellowship of believers is referred to the *Communion of Saints* although the expression could equally be translated from the Latin as *a sharing in, participating in or partaking of, holy things*. These *Holy Things* are the Eucharist, the Scriptures and the sacraments that are shared among God's Chosen People.

Since the Reformation, Protestant Church have come to understand the *communion of saints* to refer to the Christian community itself. This is founded in the writings of Paul. The phrase itself however can be traced back to one Niceties of Remesiana (writing around AD 400) where the idea was applied to the Christian community - including those who had died and those who were yet to come:

What is the Church but the congregation of all saints? From the beginning of the world, patriarchs, prophets, martyrs and all other righteous men and women who have lived or are now alive, or shall live in the time to come comprise the Church, since all have

been sanctified by one faith and manner of life and sealed by the one Spirit and so make one body, of which Christ is declared to be head, as the Scripture says.

What is being celebrated on today's feast is the fellowship that exists between believers today and the saints and martyrs who have already found salvation in Christ.

The martyrs serve as co-guarantors of the future participation in salvation of all Christians. They are the first-born in the Church (after Jesus), the men and women who offered their lives to the horrors of the stadia and mobs rather than deny Christ. They have gone where Christ went before them and we, as we "give our lives" for the sake of the Kingdom of God, will follow after them.

When St Augustine wrote his reflections on the Creed he too sought to stress this same point... *Because all the faithful form one body, the benefits belonging to one are communicated to the others.* What belongs to the saints is on offer to us as well, not through our own efforts but through our willingness to place our lives under the Rule of our Heavenly Father.

Our good deeds help others

Out of Augustine's writings comes the Church teaching that there is *another communion in the Church, which demand attention: every pious and holy action, done by one, belongs to and becomes profitable to all, through charity.* This is a key part of today's feast as it reminds us that our pursuit of holiness and faithfulness is not all about pursuing our own gift of life. The way we live in the faith community brings great hope, love, strength and eternal blessings to those who share the same faith and hope, who struggle.

for more information

www.houghongod.com

anathoth.hough@gmail.com

Twitter: myshofar

Facebook: Disciples of Christ

In Christ all believers are one in Christ

All who live in charity are one and it is this insight that leads the Church to understand the communion of saints that includes those who have died along with those still alive. In the Eucharist we celebrate the memory of the Lord Jesus and have one eye on the End Time when we all participate with him in the Heavenly Feast. It is the Eucharist that binds the living with those who have died in Christ.

The custom of celebrating the Eucharist in memory of those who had died can be traced back to the earliest days of the Church. We know of these liturgical acts through the graffiti and pictures that are found in and around cemeteries from that time. It was celebrated on the day of death and, in the case of the martyrs, on the anniversary of their death. Why was this? It was because the Eucharist was understood as being an anticipation of that Heavenly Banquet when all the Saints, of every age, would come and celebrate together.

No one worships saints!

There are still those around who speak of some Christians *praying to the saints* and in the worst of cases, *worshipping the saints*. That is far from the truth of what the Church does. The veneration of the saints is not a duty for Christians and all the Church says is that it can be helpful and useful. It is not acceptable to adore saints. God alone is to be adored. *The veneration of the saints should never be at the expense of God or Christ* (Luther).

The early faith communities had no difficulty in praying for the dead. they based their actions on the writings of Paul...*Romans 8:38-39*...

38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Because death does not separate us from those who have died, the demands of charity have us

including those who have died in faith in our prayers along with those who are still alive. In Christ there is no separation between the faithful Children of God. This is what we celebrate on this Great Day. It is in this context that I understand the words of St Therese of Lisieux (the Little Flower)...*I want to spend my heaven in doing good on earth*. She understood her special vocation (along with the vocation of all who have died) was to intercede for us and for the whole Church.

Finally - we are called to live holy lives

One of the roles the saints have in our lives is to model holiness for us. However, we need to understand what the Bible means when it speaks of this holiness. God alone is holy. We can be called "holy" only inasmuch as we live our lives in close proximity to God. Any holiness we possess is but a share in this divine holiness, a gift in which we are all invited to partake.

But God is God and there is no way in which we can come that close to the divine presence through our own efforts at living good lives. We come to the Father in and through the Son. We can know God and experience God's love for us only through the intimacy of our relationship with the Son - Jesus Christ.

The saints understood this and their individual lives are but attempts to follow the example and witness of the Master. St Francis, a favourite saint of mine, urged his followers to see themselves as being *Christs to the world*. What he meant was that Jesus Christ should come alive to others through the words and deeds of those who follow his footsteps. No one can replace Christ but we can all bring an experience of the divine and saving love of Jesus to others in the diverse circumstances in which they find themselves.

On All Saints Day we commemorate the work of God carried out through these faithful men and women. We venerate them and confidently ask that they too intercede for us before the heavenly throne. We are also uniting ourselves with all the Saints - those living, those who have already died in the ongoing worship of God.