



**All Saints**

## **THE NEW SHOFAR**

**Blessed are all those who die in Christ**

**Come to me all you who are over burdened**

### ***All Saints Day – All Souls Day***

The Church has been celebrating the holy saints from its very earliest days. Martyrs, for example, were remembered on the day of their martyrdom. Given the frequency of martyrdom at the height of Roman persecution, Bishops instituted a common day for all martyrs, the known and unknown, ensuring none were forgotten. This was set around the time of Easter, a reminder of how their death was a sharing in the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. This was not simply about honouring them. It was about the Church growing through the witness of their faithfulness and the Spirit expanding the resolve of Christians of every generation through the grace of their sacrificial dying for Christ.

But not every saint dies as a martyr. We know from **Revelation 7:9-10** that in heaven there is a great multitude of saints, far too great a number for anyone to be able to count. They were people from *every tribe and peoples, tongues and nations* and they were all standing in the Heavenly Throne room worshipping God. They are described as being *victorious* and in Revelation that is the same as saying they persevered in faithfulness (to the traditions of the Apostles), resisting all temptation to depart from Christ and go their own way or the way of the wider world. This is the meaning of the biblical word saint – someone who is steadfast in faithfulness.

### ***Those who die in Christ will rise with Him in glory***

The feasts of All Saints and All Souls are joined, but celebrate two aspects of the same reality – death. The Saints are reminders of the promise given to us by Jesus Himself. Those who die with Him will Rise with Him. This is what Paul and other writers mean when they proclaim Christ as the *firstborn of the dead*. He was the first to conquer death and to rise to a new heavenly life with His father. All who persevere in faithfulness are given the guarantee of following in the same pathway as second born, third born and so on. The Saints illustrate what is possible for all who live in the Spirit, who imitate Christ in all they do, right up to and including their death. This union with Christ is essential for we do not rise to Life through our own talents. We are raised through God's loving grace.

The Feast of all Souls brings in a further aspect of this celebration. All Saints are about all saints – those who have special days given over to them as well as those who remain forgotten and lost to history. All Souls is the feast in which we relate this to our own lives.

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We remember and unite ourselves with those we know, those we have handed over in hope to the loving mercy of God. All Souls are members of our own families and friends, those known to us as well as those souls we do not know and yet love – the stranger who dies on the lonely streets of Melbourne and is given a paupers burial. They are all our brothers and sisters, and they remain so in death as in life.

***I believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come***

This profession from our Creed can become an automatic response made in common after the end of a sermon but rarely do we have time to pause and ponder the power and beauty of what this says to all believes and what it offers to men and women everywhere. Perhaps one of the few times it does come to mind is when we are struggling to cope with the death of a loved one. It is then our faith is tested. I know from experience how crushing this can be and how important it is to have more than just good memories of the deceased person. This is where our two feasts come into their own right.

While the New Testament is conflicted about details of what happens when a person dies there are some things that are joyously clear. Our faith in the resurrection of the dead is built on the resurrection of Jesus as the Christ. It is a given, a guarantee from the Lord. Paul sets all of this out neatly in chapter **15 of 1 Corinthians**. Our believing is not in vain because Jesus was raised. By starting with this point, our fears are vanquished.

We believe we were created body and soul in the image and likeness of God and at the time of the resurrection on the Last Day we will arise body and soul to live eternally in the divine presence. In the ancient burial rites of the Church the priest would pray...*we know that in death life is changed, not ended*. Death is not a disconnection between what we are on earth and what we will be in heaven. Scripture teaches how we were created to be imperishable but not immortal, that death was a part of the life breathed into us by God.

Death then is not a punishment for our sins. It is the other side of the gift of life and it is this new life that is being celebrated in these Festivities. Sin brought about changes to the consequences of sin, but the death and resurrection of Jesus as the Christ of God restored men and women to their created place in the presence of God. Living or dying, alive or dead we are in Christ. Of course, we remain free to dismiss this possibility and choose to live in sin, choose to reject Christ but that is not what God wants. It is why He sent His Son – for our salvation. But to enjoy that gift of eternal life, faith is necessary.

***Faith and Hope are the gifts for appreciating the grace of dying***

This weekend will be a time when the Eucharist has an especially important relevance for me as I ponder the words of the priest at a funeral service...*remember now those who have died and have gone before us marked with the sign of faith*. I will be joined in a mystical sacramental way with the Church Victorious, the faithful already in heaven around the throne of God, celebrating in particular with those I love and look forward to joining once again when my own time comes to leave this mortal coil and Christ calls me home.

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