

All Saints', Year C

- All Saints' Day in the Episcopal Church is something of a conflation of what was, once upon a time, three different days
- Began with All Hallows' Eve, a day of fasting and preparation for the feast of All Saints which was to come, concluding with a vigil for All Saints' in the evening
- Of course, this celebration itself was merged with some other local customs and so morphed into the Halloween we have now – a holiday which may be about a lot of things, but fasting is certainly not one of them
- The second of these three days was the feast of All Saints, a day that was initially dedicated to commemorating the early martyrs of the faith, later extended to celebrating all of the exemplary faithful, the saints “known and unknown” here on earth
- The third day was the feast of All Souls, or the Commemoration of All Faithful Departed, a day when we celebrate and pray for the repose all the faithful who have gone before us
- I've heard this distinction illustrated a couple different ways that you may or may not find helpful – some say that All Saints' is the day on which we pray for **Saint** Mary and All Souls' is the day on which we pray for **Aunt** Mary
- Or I've heard that All Saints' is the day on which we commemorate those we might ask to pray for us, and All Souls' the day on which we commemorate those for whom we pray – though that one may be more complicated depending on your ideas around the saints interceding for us
- But either way, this was originally three different days, one for those who were distinguished in the holiness of their life and witness
- And one for those who were distinguished by the closeness and esteem in which we held and continue to hold them
- These days have more or less been combined into one in our calendar, and I think even if we commemorate all three together, it's important to remember
- Not because we want to draw too firm a distinction, really – sometimes it is worth remembering that the saints themselves, though remembered for holiness, were not perfect or sinless human beings – just ones through whom the grace of God was seen particularly clearly
- But because we don't want to completely eliminate that line for fear that we might think we can only commemorate loved ones who fit a certain set of criteria for holiness
- We can and should pray for all those dear faithful departed, even those whom we know

weren't perfect, even those whom we may have had conflicted relationships with – we should pray in hope that ultimately, God will perfect all things, including us and our relationships that were occasionally messy and often complicated

- We can take this occasion to acknowledge that we may even harbor regrets about the relationships we had with loved ones on earth, knowing that even these regrets will someday be redeemed by God
- We can and should pray for all those we miss dearly, even if we know they weren't always the model of a saint
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- As this holiday – the feast we call All Saints' Day – approached this year, I received a number of questions about who could be included in our prayers for the faithful departed
- It's the practice in a lot of places – and perhaps last year we were even fairly explicit about this being the case at Grace – to pray only for those who have died within the course of the past year
- But I want to assure you that this is a logistical consideration and not a theological one: a lot of churches do this because if we were to list of all those “whom we love but see no longer” as the BCP so beautifully calls the faithful departed, the service would get too lengthy for some people's comfort
- But this holiday is intended as the one time a year that we pray, as a gathered community, for **all** the faithful departed
- The one time a year we remember them before God, and pray for God to take care of them now since we can't any longer
- So I don't think it's a problem if our list is lengthy
- And if you thought you couldn't include departed loved ones this year just because their death fell more than 365 days ago, then I encourage you to remember them at that point in Eucharistic Prayer D when we pray for all who have died in the peace of Christ, and all those whose faith is known to God alone
- Because even if they aren't named allowed, we know that God our Father knows what we need without asking and the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words
- So as we gather around God's table, remember that we do so with angels and archangels and with the whole communion of saints gathered around the throne of God
- And together, we put voice to that faithful assurance that in death lies the gate of eternal life – that for all the faithful, life is changed, not ended – that thanks to the promise of the

Resurrection, death is not the end of our stories

- And let us continue our course on earth until, by God's call, we are once again reunited with those who have gone before