SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

*Fifth Avenue · New York City*

**Sunday, November 01, 2026**
All Saints' Day

**Procession and Solemn Eucharist**
11:00 am

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A Sermon by
The Rev. Preston Grissom
*on*
Revelation 7:9-17; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12

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## All Saints: A Family Reunion

Today is All Saints Day when we celebrate… all the saints. Not only the famous ones but all of them.

And today the Church also celebrates something called the Communion of Saints: the strange and wonderful claim that all these people belong together in one family

Growing up, my family gathered every holiday, which meant gathering at my grandmother's house with cousins, siblings, parents, aunts, uncles, and a whole collection of relatives.

And my grandparents knew everyone in their family tree it seemed, and my grandma was such a good storyteller that it felt like all those previous generations were there with us at the table.

As a kid you think everyone gets along perfectly at these events and as I got older, I discovered something else about families: they love each other, but they do not always really like each other.

And that is either true of your family too, or you are a very good liar. The Church, it turns out, is a little like that.

So, how can it be the case Christians possibly be in communion?

All Saints' makes exactly this claim that all Christians are in Communion, despite mountains of evidence to the contrary, and there are mountains.

Stanley Hauerwas, the former ethicist at Duke, once had a sign on his door that read, "A Modest Proposal for Peace: Let the Christians of the World Agree to Stop Killing Each Other."

The joke works because Christian history gives us plenty of reasons to wonder whether we are really one family at all. So how can we claim to be in Communion?

We are about to hear how in a few moments. Because in baptism we are joined to Christ's death and Resurrection, made members of his Body, and therefore joined to one another.

Communion is in Jesus Christ and nothing else. If we could ruin it, we would, but we can't. Which gives us both good news and bad news.

The good news is that you and I are included, regardless of the Halloween size skeletons in our closets. Some of you need to hear this.

The bad news is that all those other people who do not have their stuff together either are included too.

Most of us naturally build our lives around people somewhat like us. And then Jesus gives us the Church. People who are wonderful and frustrating. People whose faith seems extraordinary and people whose faith seems barely recognizable to us.

And Christ says, you all belong to me. So you belong to each other. Enjoy your communion.

In Christ, Christian community is a theological fact before it is something we feel.

Many of you have worked really hard to cultivate a community here. So it is important you see, we do not *create* Christian community. We *reveal* it. We learn to live into the family Christ has already made.

Our Epistle says it beautifully, "We are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed." We really are God's children now. And we are not yet everything God is making us to be. But we belong to Christ, we belong together. Now we have to learn to live like it.

So, do we do that by simply being nice to each other? It turns out no, it is much deeper than that, as our Gospel reveals.

Jesus goes up the mountain and tells us what the blessed life together looks like, the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers, those who suffer for righteousness.

These are hardly the qualities we would cling to naturally or the world ordinarily rewards. But look closely and you begin to notice something.

They look like Jesus.

He is meek. He is merciful. He mourns. He makes peace. He suffers for righteousness. Jesus Christ is the Beatitudes in human form.

And because we belong to him, we are being formed to look like him.

Now, if you are anything like me, you can read that list and find some qualities that you occasionally resemble and several others that simply do not.

That is another reason I am grateful for the Communion of Saints.

In practice, the Beatitudes are not only a list each of us must somehow perfectly accomplish alone, but they describe what the Body of Christ looks like together.

I need maternal saints who know what it is to mourn and to comfort. I need Palestinian saints who have suffered for righteousness sake. I need saints whose mercy stretches much further than mine. I need other Christians because none of us looks like Jesus all by ourselves.

Together, the Body of Christ begins to take his shape, and its shape is that of our crucified Savior. That is how we live like a Community, by honoring each other's vulnerabilities and gifts, not because we must be polite or nice to each other, but because in the aggregate they reflect the nature of our God.

And this is where All Saints becomes even stranger and, I think, much more beautiful.

In Revelation, John sees, "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages," gathered around the throne of God.

Every nation. Every generation. People we know. People we never knew. People whose names we could not even pronounce.

If our connection is dependent on similarity or getting along we don't stand a chance, but if our Communion is established by Christ, then no distance, language barrier, cultural difference, or even death has the power to undo it.

And today, we especially remember there are saints we have loved who are no longer sitting beside us. People whose absence still changes the shape of a room, a holiday, a family.

And there are millions more whose graves no one visits, whose names no one speaks, whose stories have disappeared from human memory.

But they have not disappeared from God.

The Christian claim is not simply that the dead live on because we remember them, or that they remain "in our hearts," beautiful as those things may be. The claim is much more audacious. Jesus Christ is alive. And those who have died in him have not been lost to him.

In Christ, death changes *how* we are together. It does not change *that* we are together.

And every Sunday, the Church does something extraordinary.

As we gather around this altar, we are reminded that what we can see is not all that is taking place. In the Eucharistic Prayer, the Celebrant says that we join our voices, "with angels and archangels, and with *all the company of heaven*."All the company of heaven.

Every Mass is a family reunion.

Christ is the Host. The saints who came before us have arrived early. And now we join them. Wendell Berry wrote, "The dead now live in the permanent world, WE are the absent ones." So, every Mass we join them.

Whether you miss them deeply or don't know their names at all, Christ has already made you family.

Not because we can see them or feel them or get along with them, but because they belong to the Risen Christ. And so do we.

And so on this All Saints' Day, we eat the Holy Meal, not simply to remember the dead, but to worship the living God, with whom they live even after death, and in whom we have the hope of meeting again, not just in the future but right now.

Amen.