

St. John's Home Worship, 1st November 2020

Words to be said together (if you would like to do so) are in **bold type**.

Welcome to our worship together.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Come, people of God! **He has called us and chosen us.**

Come, people of God! **We are part of his family.**

Come, people of God! **With brothers and sisters from every nation.**

And come, all you who seek Him. **He is waiting to welcome you.**

Father, we worship you today with the church throughout the world, and we praise you for those witnesses who have gone before us. Help us to fix our attention on you now, and to understand more of what you have done for us and who we are in you, and to worship you from our hearts. In Jesus' name, **Amen.**

Today is All Saints Day, the day in the church calendar when we think about God's people who have gone before us. In some of our church traditions, we particularly remember those who helped us to come to faith.

A hymn we often sing at this time of year is 'For all the saints.' It tells us how we and the Christians who have gone before us are all one in Christ. You can find it on Youtube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21GTTM2TIYA>.

HYMN

For all the saints who from their labours rest,
who thee by faith before the world confessed,
thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

Thou wast their rock, their fortress, and their
might;
thou, Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight;
thou, in the darkness drear, their one true light.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

O blest communion, fellowship divine,
we feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
yet all are one in thee, for all are thine.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

(William Walsham How, 1823-1897)

The golden evening brightens in the west;
soon, soon to faithful warriors cometh rest.
Sweet is the calm of paradise the blest.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

But lo! there breaks a yet more glorious
day;
the saints triumphant rise in bright array;
the King of glory passes on his way.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's
farthest coast,
through gates of pearl streams in the
countless host,
singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Alleluia! Alleluia!

PRAYER FOR TODAY

God of holiness, your glory is proclaimed in every age:
as we rejoice in the faith of your saints,
inspire us to follow their example with boldness and joy;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

(Common Worship)

READINGS

Ephesians 1:11-23 (NIV)

¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.

¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Luke 6:20-31 (NIV)

²⁰ Looking at his disciples, he said:

'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹ Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

²² Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.

²³ 'Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

²⁴ 'But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.

²⁵ Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.

²⁶ Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

²⁷ 'But to you who are listening I say: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you. ²⁹ If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

TALK

If I were to ask you to think of a saint, or some saints, I wonder who you'd think of. Maybe it would be someone from the Bible. Maybe it would be someone in a stained glass window, wearing a halo! Perhaps one of the Northumbrian saints, like Cuthbert. Someone known for their service to others, like Mother Teresa, or someone else whose story has inspired you. Maybe someone who died for their faith – as many Christian people have done and continue to do. Or someone who gave up their life for other people, like Maximilian Kolbe, the Polish Franciscan who, in Auschwitz, chose to take the place of another prisoner who'd been selected to die. "Greater love has no one than this, than someone lay down their life for their friends." Or maybe you're thinking of someone who's very much alive! Maybe it's someone who helps other people, really gives of themselves – or someone who keeps positive and cheerful despite great difficulties. You sometimes hear people say, 'She's a real saint,' or 'he's got the patience of a saint'.

The word we get 'saint' from means 'holy', and when the Bible talks about 'the saints', it's talking about God's holy people – the whole body of believers. There's nowhere in the New Testament that suggests that only a very few super-special people are saints. Paul addresses several of his letters 'to the saints in _____', when he's writing to whole churches. If he could write one to us, he might start it, "To the saints in Kingston Park," because that's what we are, too - God's people in this place.

What are they like, these people of God? The Bible shows us old believers and young ones, men and women, rich and poor, fishermen and public officials, soldiers and tradespeople and slaves. They don't all agree about everything. Some of them make mistakes. But they all have in common their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and saviour. And the Lord Jesus called all of them – as He calls of us – to a life of love and sacrifice and service. We heard in Luke's gospel how Jesus turns upside down the values and assumptions of society. We shouldn't get complacent: it's those who are poor and hungry and sad, Jesus says, who will end up happy, and those who are rejected for His sake who are following in the footsteps of God's servants the prophets, while those who are just pleasing the crowds are actually missing the boat. And Jesus sets His followers a standard of love and living that's really challenging. Love your enemies, and pray for them! Don't get your own back or demand your rights, but give generously. Treat other people the way you'd want to be treated. It isn't guaranteed to be comfortable – but, Jesus says, 'Great is your reward in heaven'.

It's a challenge – but also, what a privilege! Our other reading was part of Ephesians 1. This is an amazing chapter, in which Paul praises God for what He's done for His people. God has chosen us as His own, and made us His children, forgiven our sins and poured out His grace on us.

We belong to God! Then in verse 13: 'When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit'. A seal could be used to show who something belonged to – it might be put on goods, or people might mark cattle with a mark of ownership. But that's an external thing. As people who belong to God, we're marked with the Holy Spirit – God himself living inside us, teaching and guiding us, and giving us his strength and power. And the Holy Spirit's presence in us is a deposit – like a down-payment, and a foretaste of what's to come – to show that the rest of what God has promised will really happen: that one day, God will be fully present with His people in a new heaven and a new earth, and we shall be transformed into everything that He wants us to be. And several times, Paul says it's all 'for the praise of

His glory' – we're to bring praise to God, not only by our own worship and praise, but by the lives we live, and by helping others also to see His goodness and grace.

Maybe someone today is thinking, 'I want to belong to God, I want to be part of His family' but you aren't sure if you're there yet. If that's you, if you want Him, then, you can be absolutely sure that He also wants you, that He loves you, and He longs for you to come to Him. If you have questions or you want to know more about what all this means, do think about joining in with Alpha Online – there's more in your newsletter and on Facebook about that.

Finally, let's look at this wonderful prayer of Paul's. If we're believers, we already have the Holy Spirit in us, but Paul prays that the Spirit will work in them so that they'll know God better, know Christ better, and know the hope that God gives us and his power in our lives. We could do a lot worse than to pray these things for ourselves, as we look forward to the day when our hope is fulfilled. The very same power that raised Jesus from the dead is there 'for us who believe' – so who knows what God could do with us and for us.

So, saints of St John's, you're part of a very big family of believers in Christ - one that's been around for two thousand years. Stick close to Him, and let the Spirit work in you, and who knows what chapters we'll be adding to the story of Christ's church!

PRAYERS

Our prayers (written by Nina Lloyd-Hirst) use a response from the hymn, 'For all the Saints':

Thy name, O Jesus, be for ever blest: Alleluia!

In the power of the Spirit, let us pray for the church and for the world
and let us give thanks to our heavenly Father for all the blessings of this life.

In all that we are, in all that we do, in all that we speak:

Thy name, O Jesus, be for ever blest: Alleluia!

Father, we give you thanks for all who have encouraged and strengthened us in the faith,
for teachers and preachers, for friends and family.

We pray for the church in this place and throughout the world,
that through its faithful witness all may know your love, your peace and your joy.

We pray for those who suffer for their faith: encourage them and give them your peace.

In all that we are, in all that we do, in all that we speak:

Thy name, O Jesus, be for ever blest: Alleluia!

Father, we give you thanks for the kingdoms of this world,
for political leaders and governments, for all in authority.

We pray that they may rule with integrity and wisdom.

We pray for those who are exploited, for all political prisoners,
for those who yearn for freedom and justice.

We pray for areas in the world where there is poverty, war and civil unrest.

We pray for refugees and for all who work to alleviate suffering.

In all that we are, in all that we do, in all that we speak:

Thy name, O Jesus, be for ever blest: Alleluia!

Father, we give you thanks for all who work in the NHS,
for all those seeking to find a solution to the problems of disease,
especially those seeking to find vaccinations and treatment for Covid.
We pray for all those we know in any kind of need,
for those who are sick in body, mind or spirit, for those who mourn.
We lift them into the light of God's presence,
that they may know His healing power
and be filled with His love, His joy and His peace.

In all that we are, in all that we do, in all that we speak:
Thy name, O Jesus, be for ever blest: Alleluia!

Father, we give you thanks that in the darkness of this world your saints shine.
May we, like them shine on earth and share in your everlasting kingdom.

In all that we are, in all that we do, in all that we speak:
Thy name, O Jesus, be for ever blest: Alleluia!

SONG: GIVE THANKS

(On YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bk_7wUR2Wdg)

Give thanks with a grateful heart.
Give thanks to the Holy One.
Give thanks, because he's given Jesus Christ, His Son.

And now let the weak say 'I am strong',
Let the poor say 'I am rich',
Because of what the Lord has done for us.

Give thanks.

(Henry Smith. Copyright © 1978 Integrity's Hosanna! Music.)

BLESSING

May the word of God be the light for our paths;
May the praise of God be the song on our lips;
May the love of God be the warmth of our hearts;
May the joy of God be the strength of our lives;
May the peace of God be the place where we rest;
And may God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit
Bless us and those whom we love, now and always. **Amen**

*Service prepared by Julie Horton. Prayers written by Nina Lloyd-Hirst.
Holy Bible, New International Version® Anglicized, NIV® Copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 by [Biblica, Inc.®](http://www.biblica.com) Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.
Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England (2000) material from which is included in this service, is copyright © The Archbishops' Council (2000).*