**The communion of saints.**

**What does that phrase mean to you?**

**Two verses from St. Paul’s first letter to the Church in Corinth mean a lot to me. F**rom 1 Corinthians 10.16, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?”, and, from 1 Corinthians 12.27, “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

Reading these two verses together, we both partake of the body of Christ when we receive Holy Communion and are part of the body of Christ, through being members of the Church.

**The communion of saints.**

In this service of Holy Communion, we are in communion with our Lord. We are also in communion with one another. All over the world the Church is celebrating Holy Communion, and so in this service we are joined with them.

Communion is not limited by geography.

Communion is not limited either, by space or by time, so there is a very real sense that in this service we are joined in communion with all who have gone before us in the faith.

This, then, is **the communion of saints.**

**Charles Wesley encapsulated this well in a verse of one of his hymns:**

**“**One family, we dwell in him,

one Church, above, beneath;

though now divided by the stream,

the narrow stream of death.**”**

**Both All Saints and All Souls celebrate this, but from slightly different perspectives.**

In All Saints, our focus is more on those whom the Church has marked out in some way as an example to us – someone whom we commemorate as an example of life or witness to the faith.

All Souls has a more local and perhaps more intimate sense about it. We remember those who have been special to us, as family members, friends, or those who have personally encouraged us in our faith.

I remember being told, as a young man, in relation to Christian salvation, “we have been saved from the penalty of sin, we are being saved from the power of sin, and we shall be saved from the presence of sin”.

This is widely quoted, but I have not been able to find out its source.

It is the perfect answer to the occasional fundamentalist Christian who asks you, “Are you saved?”

**“I have been saved from the penalty of sin, I am being saved from the power of sin, and I shall be saved from the presence of sin.”**

That threefold formula of past, present and future anchors us in our present position in the communion of saints and reminds us of the hope that we have for the future.

Our All Saints’ Day readings look to the future.

The Book of Revelation was written at a time of persecution of the Christian Church. Much of the imagery that would have been familiar to its early readers has been lost to us, but the passage before us today is clearly a view of heaven, in which there is great assurance of comfort for the future – a vision of the communion of saints in the life of the world to come.

Those who have suffered for their faith in this earthly life will find relief and joy in the world to come. There is no limit on numbers, on tribe nationality or language.

Our reading from the first letter of St. John centres on love. God’s love for us is such that it gives us hope. There is much that we do not know, but what we know of God is that he loves us. We respond to that love by loving others in turn and by seeking to live lives worthy of the love of God.

Our Gospel reading, from St. Matthew’s Gospel, is the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount.

In a world that looked up to, and still looks up to, the powerful, the rich, the self-confident, the winner, the wheeler-dealer and the ruthless, what Jesus teaches is topsy-turvy.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, and blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely\* on my account.

It sounds like a bunch of losers, in worldly terms – and so it is. But these are characteristics of those who care for others, who care about others, who care about God. God cares too, and they are ones who are dear to his heart.

Jesus promises theirs is the kingdom of heaven, they will be comforted, they will inherit the earth, they will be filled, they will receive mercy, they will see God, they will be called children of God, and theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Jesus says again, rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

**The communion of saints.**

**It may have its drawbacks, but you know what is right.**

**The communion of saints.**

**Jesus points to it and Jesus is what it is all about. Amen.**