



A Message from the Bishop

All Saints Day, November 1, is a beloved day in the Church Year calendar. On All Saints we celebrate the communion we share with people of faith both living and dead. Who are those saints? Well, they are you and me and many others. "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are (I John 3:1)."

This year we celebrate All Saints in the midst of a pandemic with record numbers of new cases being set weekly. Public health officials are telling us that even harder days lie ahead, that the numbers of people infected with Covid are likely to get much higher in the weeks and months to come.

I urge congregations to continue to hold worship online and to resist the temptation to return to in-person gatherings for worship and congregational activities. I know people long to be together in person to pray and commune, to support and care for one another. Meeting virtually certainly has its limits. But the risk is too great. Our God gives us the freedom in Jesus Christ to use our heads and take those steps that lower the risks of spreading the virus.

Dr. Michael Osterholm, University of Minnesota epidemiologist and Director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Public Policy, says the virus is like a wildfire that will keep spreading. It may die down periodically. But until a vaccine is found the virus will continue to infect others unless people take steps to mitigate the spread. With the numbers rising to unacceptable levels in Wisconsin, we need to keep maintaining physical distance, wear masks, and wash hands.

Dear synod, we can do this. With the help of God we can get through these coming weeks and do our part to love and care for our neighbors. We are not alone. God is with us. God blesses us with God's own presence and gives us the gift of one another. We can encourage and care for one another in the midst of these difficult days.

All Saints is a reminder of the life we share and the life God gives. All Saints is a kind of Easter in November, a celebration of God's life and light at the very time when the leaves are falling, the air getting colder and the daylight hours growing shorter. God's gift is one of life over death, hope over despair, and love over bitterness and hatred.

There has been a lot of loss in this pandemic. Lives have been disrupted and hardships endured. We have all experienced the loss and been impacted in some way...in our churches and schools, homes and families, businesses and communities.

In the midst of this loss God comes with the comfort and assurance of God's love for us in Jesus Christ. All Saints gives us hope, encouragement and strength for the coming days. Revelation chapter 7 lifts up a beautiful vision and proclaims: "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb." The vision points to people in newly washed robes who have survived horrific times. They are seated before the throne and praising the Lamb when the writer says: "They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Hang in there, dear people of God. We can do this—faithfully, lovingly, responsibly, with God's help, comfort and assurance.

Bishop Mansholt