

**St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Fairfield, Connecticut**  
**Week of November 1, 2006**

**For all the Saints**

Few of them knew it, but Tuesday's procession of Halloween pirates, goblins, monsters, superheroes and heroines were actually celebrating All-Hallows Evening.

Halloween costumes usually celebrate the Unhallowed, That Which Is Not Yet We Fear It. Yesterday, the Feast of All Saints, celebrated the Hallowed Ones, as in "hallowed be thy name," those who eternally Are and who love us. They are the Saints with the capital S, and we venerate them as they shine like the stars in the night sky.

These Saints are as different from one another as human beings are individually unique. They include scholars like Anselm and Augustine, mystics like Julian and Bonaventure, reformers like Catherine, Francis, and Martin Luther, and magistrates like Gregory the Great and Margaret of Scotland. They are the spiritual descendants of the first Apostles, themselves unique individuals—the impulsive and stubborn Peter, the utterly self-giving and devoted Mary, the profound and strident Paul, the plain and practical James.

Saints also did wrong, as St. Bernard, for example, did when he urged the second Crusade upon the Pope and nobles of Europe as a way of diverting Christians from fighting each other—just as Pope Urban II (beatified in 1881, but not canonized, that is declared a Saint) had done when he concluded a fiery sermon that effectively launched the first Crusade as a Christian jihad, "Deus vult!"—God wills it.

Like all Christians, Saints are forgiven sinners. Peter denied even knowing Jesus. What Saints have in common is not perfection, but a passionate devotion to God and the Way of the Cross as revealed in Jesus Christ. It isn't as though they never strayed from that devotion. We venerate them because they returned to that devotion and heroically refused to let any earthly or cosmic power divert them permanently from it.

Today is the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed or All Souls Day. It emerged in Christian observance in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Abuses around paying for masses for the dead led Protestant reformers to delete it from Anglican observance. It has been restored as an optional observance throughout the Anglican Communion because it celebrates the virtue of ordinary Christians who knew and served the Lord in their own generation. It is especially a day for remembering family members and loved ones who have died, and particularly for remembering and thanking God for those ordinary saints who by word and example taught us that the Way of the Cross is the way of life and peace.

Because we believe in the Communion of the Saints it is therefore appropriate, useful and even vital to pray to those faithful ones who have gone before us for assistance, protection, and guidance. They are our friends still and forever in the heavenly realm where they look upon the face of God. May the souls of all the faithful departed rest in peace; and may light perpetual shine upon them. And may we be ever inspired by their example of passionate devotion to the Way. Amen.

—Rev. Ben Brockman

**St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Fairfield, Connecticut**  
**Week of November 16, 2006**

**Deciding on Hope**

Hope is one of the Theological Virtues, along with Faith and self-giving Love. These virtues stand alongside the four Cardinal Virtues—Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance—and array themselves against the more famous and, alas, sometimes more interesting Seven Deadly Sins: pride, envy, avarice, anger, lust, gluttony, and sloth.

Hope is a key theme of the fast-approaching season of Advent, which is the season embraced by the four Sundays preceding Christmas. The Church in watchful expectation begins a new year by focusing on the three-fold “coming in” of Jesus: his birth in Bethlehem; his birth in the heart of every believer; and his coming again in triumph and great glory to bring in his everlasting realm of peace and light.

Theologians define hope as “confidence in God’s goodness, tempered by fear of God’s justice.” Hope opposes both pride, which denies the need for God’s mercy, and pride’s mirror image, despair, which considers itself beyond God’s mercy. Of all the insights into hope that I’ve come across, one of the best is a recent comment by the Christian political activist Jim Wallis:

What the world needs most of all from faith-based people is the energy of hope, the power and promise of hope. And hope is not a feeling. Hope is a decision. It's a choice. It's how you decide to live. . . .

Wallis’ work connects religion and social justice in terms that I can imagine Jesus using. If you are interested in reading more, go to <http://www.sojo.net>.

Right now, I want to emphasize Wallis’ insight that hope is a decision. Christian faith affirms the experience and the belief of countless generations, that God’s love definitively conditions our world, bending the arc of the universe toward that love.

But hope changes belief into action. Hope means that you keep on trying, out of the conviction that it matters whose side you are on, as the promises made by or on behalf of people being baptized insist. Deciding on hope means that even though you may never see the final outcome, you act as though your efforts will assist in the eventual and inevitable birth of Something Good. To hope is to invest yourself in the possibility of God’s not yet.

That’s when hope does, I believe, become a feeling too, or at least it produces feelings of peace, satisfaction, and joy. Doesn’t it? And the experience of hope fulfilled rekindles faith, and the memory of hope fulfilled becomes the Bible itself.

What if I had not believed that I should see the goodness of the Lord  
in the land of the living!  
O tarry and await the Lord’s pleasure; be strong, and God shall comfort your  
heart. Wait patiently for the Lord. (Psalm 27: 17-18)

—Rev. Ben Brockman