

*Officially*, the tradition of the church has been that the whole church year and our worship revolves around *Christmas* and *Easter*. But it has taken me a long time to recognize that, *practically*, I *experience it somewhat differently*. And maybe you do too. But we've not usually been given a way to think about it so that we could consciously claim our experience. That is what I want to offer to you today. See if this helps. Because...there is something about the Fall season of the year which can be...deeply spiritual...and Christian **(1)**.

*In my experience*, the *center* of the church year is *Christmas*. And then, orbiting around Christmas, so to speak, has been Easter in the Spring—but then also, in my experience, *the Fall*. But for the longest time I didn't have the words to be able to say why the Fall felt as important as Easter. In recent years I have recognized that there is in fact a parallel between Easter and All Saints' Day which we are acknowledging today.

The key to recognizing this is that in the ancient tradition of the church, Easter is not spoken of as just *one* day but as *three*. In fact, it was called the *Holy Triduum*, i.e. "The Great Three Days". And that is why we still celebrate Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Day in the Spring. Those three days tell of Jesus' journey into suffering and evil, his crucifixion death, and his mysterious resurrection into new life.

So, here's the surprise: *There is actually a parallel set of Three Days that is hidden in plain sight in the Fall*. And they are *Halloween* (or All Hallows' Eve) on October 31, *All Saints' Day* (or All Hallows' Day) on November 1, and *All Souls' Day* on November 2 **(2)**. Since we do not usually observe this sequence of days within the worship customs of Grace Church, we easily miss the parallelism with Easter. We do instead always observe a single combined day, each year, on the Sunday afterwards and it is called *All Saints' Sunday*.

What is different about these Three Days in the Fall is that they do not speak of *Jesus'* suffering, death, and resurrection like they do in the Spring with Easter. Instead, these Three Days in the Fall speak about *our own* suffering, death, and resurrection. And that is why this time in the Fall can carry for us a different kind of poignancy than Easter. And it seems to me we may almost instinctively experience this poignancy without even understanding the church feast days I've named. Something of this spiritual awareness already lingers in Fall itself.

1. *Halloween* may be almost as commercialized as Christmas but just as Christmas has its own religious integrity despite the commercialization, so does Halloween. Halloween actually invites us to recognize the scary, horrible, and evil things that exist in our world. On Halloween, God has given us a way to *play* with our fears—which is a curious thing to do—and yet is possible because of what comes *the next day*.
2. Halloween spins right into the next day which is *All Saints' Day*. And the message there is as astonishing as Easter Day. God looks at a world full of the scary, horrible, and evil—and loves us despite it all. God sees more than monsters, God sees light in the darkness, God sees God's image in each of us even when it is distorted, God sees the potential for saints in each of us even when we cannot imagine it at all. God calls out to us to be the saints *that we can be*. And in every generation there are those who hear the call and respond. Sometimes people can even hear God's call and not realize it is a call from *God*, but they nevertheless become saints in the world. Being a saint isn't about being *good enough*—it is about *responding to the call however we can*.
3. And then comes the third day. All Saints' Day becomes *All Souls' Day*. When we glimpse something of the revelation of the glory of God's love for such a suffering, deathward, and monstrous world, then we are drawn to a hope that there is hope for *everybody*. All Souls' Day invites us to hold out a holy hope for *all who have ever lived, suffered, and died—saints and all*. This is when it can get very personal, remembering our family members and friends who have suffered and died and who have passed beyond our sight. This is why our prayers will go up today for the memory of all our parishioners who have died in the past year. And at the same time, our minds and hearts may also range far from home, calling to mind so many

strangers who have stirred our compassion--whom we have encountered in reading history and our contemporary news. To feel for others like that is to live with the hope of All Souls' Day.

The Three Great Days of Fall invite us to knowingly enter into our struggles with a scary world, the merciful call of God in the midst of it, and the hope of the resurrection that hovers over all. We may feel some part of this in our bones...as the leaves fall...the days grow darker and colder...the home fires are lit...hospitality becomes dear...and our hearts are reminded of loves that do not let us go.

This time of year is, to me, *the other great Easter time, almost hidden in the Fall*. I loved this time even before I knew all the reasons why I could. Now, I hope you have more reasons to love this time of year as well.

*Footnotes:*

- (1) *These days I rarely return to former homilies except as reference points. But this homily is an edit of the one I wrote for November 6, 2022 which I find so compelling that it almost doesn't seem like I wrote it. I know I need to hear it once again—and perhaps you may too.*
- (2) *If you come from a Roman Catholic background then what you will hear here will be familiar but also somewhat different. The Episcopal tradition has a different perspective on these Three Days in the Fall and my interpretation has also been influenced by the Christian mystical tradition.*