The Hallows, releasing the inner saint



Well, yesterday and last night the world recognised the scary, the ugly, the broken, the wicked and the darkness. Which, in many ways, we do need to do. Because it is real. The world can feel scary, and broken, and the forces of evil and unsettledness can feel very present in our society and in our hearts and imaginations.

We in Britain have kept a festival on this night since before Christianity came to our land – the pagan festival of *Samhain*. It was a festival that marked our fear of the dead and the life beyond what we see here on earth. The sense of the unknown filled it with fear and dismay.

And yet, when the pagans met Christ, they kept and transformed that night. They changed the name of Samhain – into *All Hallows' Eve*. The night before the Hallows. The Holy Ones of God. The Saints. Today is All Saints' Day.

When the clock struck midnight, they said, at that hour the saints would walk abroad and all evil would be overcome, and all that is evil would cower away for cover for another year. Because in the face of that light they could not stand.

Yes, it is true that there are forces of evil in our world. Things that oppress, and depress, that frighten and twist the beauty of Creation out of shape. And it is wise to acknowledge that.

But, in the faith, we can stare that darkness in the face. We can stare down evil and darkness and things that try to corrupt and misshape, and we stare them down in the name of Light and Love that will not take 'no' for an answer. The Light and Love that has looked full on evil, and taken it to the Cross; raided the forces of hell, and walks triumphant in a resurrection morning. And who promises us that he will draw all peoples to himself, he will be always with us, and that he will share with us his power to overcome evil and injustice and fear.

And for our dead, too, there is no need for fear and dismay. For now we know that those who have died are gathered into the love and light of Christ, in a life so much more full and blessed than we can ever imagine, where, as our reading from Revelation says, every tear is wiped away from their eyes. And what's more, their prayers and their love join with ours, as a real and active force in the world. We never stand alone in the faith, we stand with the whole company of heaven, gathered around us.

A great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages says S. John in his beautiful poetic vision for us today.

And so… the feast of fear, became a feast of joy and of hope. We can dare to dress up as witches, ghouls and demons and laugh in the face of darkness, because we have a resurrection faith and we stand in the light of the victory won for us by Jesus our Lord, and we stand there in the great company of the saints, and the angels.

And this day is therefore a blessing, but also a call to life.

As we rejoice in the Saints in heaven, we recall our own sainthood too; within us all is a saint who God named and claimed from before the very beginning.

As Christians we were all created full of God's grace and light and beautiful in his eyes. As the church we are called to be his Body here on earth: his love, his justice, his peace, his hope. And that is our deepest truth, no matter what the fears and distortions of life's journey and the outer world can sometimes try to tell us. And so we are called to shine that light into the world through our own particular gifts and beauties, with all the saints throughout the ages, into a world that is held so much in fear and darkness and injustice.

In our reading from Matthew's gospel today Jesus states this manifesto call for the Church – blessed are those who are not puffed up with themselves, blessed are those who cry out in sorrow, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed the merciful, the pure, the peacemakers, those who stand up for Truth and Love and Mercy even when the world throws it back in our face.

Blessed are those who live into their inner saint – for in this way the kingdom comes, and a world can be blessed by light and healing.

So many people become what society, or other people expect them to be, but here today we celebrate that we uncover our inner Saint, by becoming the person that God wants us to be. The person that Jesus calls by name. And that, in living into that calling, as part of the great multitude of the company of the faithful, we stand as part of the light that shatters the darkness, and tells the unknown there is a Truth that holds all fear.

I wonder if you feel ready to be a saint? After all, not all of us like photos, let alone being immortalised in a stained-glass window. Those of the Canon of Saints in whose prayers we so often gather to worship – the disciples, the apostles, the great names of history, might make us feel a little unworthy of the name.

It is of course wonderfully true that the saints were a motley bunch – with stories of great grace, and also many human fragilities. We do not honour the saints because they were perfect and impossibly righteous, but because in the stories of those saints we simply glimpse a little of what it looks like to live a life wherein the love of God burned particularly strong, through those who shone particularly brightly with the inner light of who they were meant to be, and that they shared that light within the community in which they were placed to serve. (and continue to share it with us in their protection and their prayers). And we can be encouraged because that love is there

for us too, to shine through the particular people we are meant to be, into the chapter and place where we are given to love.

And so there is courage for us – we do not have to be perfect and impossibly righteous, we simply need to open our hearts that God can release the inner saint, knowing also that we never walk alone.

So today, sisters and brothers, let us celebrate the saints – the glorious holy company of the faithful in Christ in whose light and love we walk and in whose company we can face down any evil. Let us celebrate their stories – known and unknown – and walk in their footsteps.

Let us take courage in these times of fear to become who we are - the sacred, holy, irreplaceable person touched by Jesus, little fragments of his light in the world - and to share it.

For there is One who calls us by Name – and he says, Come, Follow me. *Rejoice and be glad.*

For together, with all the company of heaven and the faithful through the ages we are called to be – and yes, all of us are, The Hallows, the Holy Ones of God. The Saints.

Because, although the brokenness and darkness of the world is real, we need not to be afraid of it. For where the company of heaven on earth, and beyond the earth, walks, prays, serves, stands, loves together in the Name and Presence of Christ… in the face of that light no evil can stand.