

Sermon Feast of All Saints Evensong 2020

One of the personal sadness's of this past year has been the postponement of all weddings at this church. Some clergy love to grizzle and moan about their wedding ministry. It is a part of my ministry I actually love. I love the joy and optimism of the young couples I deal with. I love meeting their families. I love the good will they express toward the church. I love the mood of celebration and joy of the big day. Of course, one ubiquitous feature of modern weddings is the role of the photographer. That can be a tad annoying. But, of course, we understand the desire to 'capture' something of what for most couples *will be* the most important day of their life.

Now, the photographer may be a professional or a family friend. In any case, there are usually shots of the bride and groom, and of them in combination with members of their wedding party and their families. The photographer directs everyone where to stand. The people smile: the camera clicks, and this group, at this one moment in time, captured forever. Even long after the event, wedding photos get their share of attention. Someday the couple's great-grandchildren may gaze at the picture, looking back in time to see their oldest remembered relatives as they were on their wedding day. There is something wonderful about wedding photos: being in them, watching them taken, looking at them long afterward.

This great feast of All Saints, might suggest to us a big wedding photo. Now, its a wedding that has not yet happened, but in faith we confess will happen. And so sure are we that it is to happen that we can imagine that picture with numerous figures, populated by some familiar faces, people well known to us, people we've heard about, as well as others whom may not know.

Centre of the photo is Christ, the groom. The bride is the Church. Those who gather beside them for this photo are saints from every age and every land. This photo has not yet been taken, because the numbers are not quite complete, but we should be able to imagine this picture: that vast throng, with Christ and his Bride at the centre. With John the Baptist, as best man, dressed up in a camel hair suit. Among the groomsmen are the apostles. Mary is standing by, too; not the young girl from all of those baby pictures of Jesus, but a stately matron in a suitable dress for the mother-of-the-groom. We see as well, Mary's aged parents, Joachim and Anne. Nearby is Mary Magdalene, dressed up and ready to dance.

This is not a wedding where the colour and style of the clothing is coordinated. They are dressed in every fashion and with no fashion at all. Louis of France, who wore a crown for Christ, stands beside Francis, who wore rags for Christ. Two teenage girls stand with arms around each other: one is Agnes, martyr at Rome from 1,700 years ago; the other is Maria Goretti, a girl martyr from a small Italian village just over 100 year ago. Just beyond them is a Mexican farm worker, a Russian grandmother, an Anglican Divine, a Baptist from Harlem, a Lutheran from Helsinki.

In your mind's eye, look again, and you will recognize faces from your own past. Perhaps a neighbour from your childhood; some friend from long ago; a co-worker from your first job; the grandparent who always had time for you; a parish member whose funeral you attended. It is a vast throng gathered to celebrate this marriage, yet here and there you recognize a face that delights you, even surprises you. The invitation list was a long one - and written in the Bridegroom's blood.

The wide-angle lens photo taken at the wedding of Christ and the Church is a real picture, populated by real people. The faces of the saints bear witness to their histories and to their hopes now become real. And even these faces are familiar, and we know some of them, there is something different about them. Because there is *something about Jesus* that shines out from them. And because they are real, they are ordinary. Not all made up, not superficially pretty or handsome, not the kind of faces that normally pass as great and note-worthy. But they are beautiful, alive, radiant, fitting for guests who have come as friends of the bride and groom.

Perhaps this is the secret of the saints. They are real people gathered around the bride and groom. They are those who have gathered around Christ and his church. They know him. They have accepted his invitation. And in his church, they have found their family and their home. It is God's good grace which called them. God's good grace which brings them to this banquet. And that same grace which is at work in us, calling us also to know Christ the groom better. Calling us also to find our home and our family in his church. God's grace calling us to take our place amongst that vast throng past counting. Amen.