

*Sunday Worship
A Service for Your Use at Home
St Paul United Church of Christ
5312 Old Blue Rock Road
Cincinnati, Ohio 45247
Allen M Fluent, Pastor
November 1, 2020*

Because of the pandemic caused by the corona virus, our congregation, along with many others, has decided that we must forego gathered worship services at this time. Each Sunday until we gather again, we will provide worship materials that members and friends can use in our homes in the knowledge that we are not alone, but are celebrating these holy days with our friends and neighbors in the faith. As you use this worship service, I hope you will pause and remember the tune to a familiar hymn as you read the words, and pray as partners in the fellowship of Christ.

If you have access to a computer or cell phone, you may want to open the video recordings of the Sermon and Scripture provided by the pastor on both our church website and the message sent to all who are on our email list.

Today is November 1. It is the Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost and All Saints Day. In the German tradition of our church, it is common to refer to our worship on this day as "Totenfest" (in German, literally, "The Festival of the Dead"). Today we remember before God those persons in our fellowship and our extended community who have passed from this life during the past year. Our opening hymn is sung in their memory. "For all the saints who from their labors rest":

***For all the saints who from their labors rest,
who thee by faith before the world confessed,
thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.***

Alleluia! Alleluia!

***Thou wast their rock, their fortress and their might;
thou, Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight;
thou in the darkness drear their one true light.***

Alleluia! Alleluia!

***From earth's wide bounds and ocean's farthest coast,
through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost:***

Alleluia! Alleluia!

***O blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle; they in glory shine.
Yet all are one in thee, for all are thine.
Alleluia! Alleluia!***

Call to Worship and Moment to Remember the Saints

My friends, we are gathered today in the Holy Fellowship of the Realm of God. We are gathered in the Spirit, not only with our companions who are physically present with us today, but with the whole fellowship of the People of God in all ages and places who have borne witness to Gospel of Christ – those who have gone before us and those who are still to come. We hold those sacred in our memory who have guided our faith and shared the goodness of God’s love.

Our hearts are full of the memories we hold for beloved friends and family members who have passed from this life to rest in God. We remember them all, and now we lift up the names of those in our fellowship who have passed from this earthly life over the past 12 months:

(The names are read)

Jerry Bertram
Vi Bettner
Virginia Duffy
Lynn Grau
Lee Jung
Jean Kupfer
Robert Leytze

Vergie Leytze
Betty Mitchell
John Parker
James Ruebusch
Tom Schlueter
Dave Shea

In remembrance of those beloved in our memory, listen to these words from the Wisdom of Solomon, about the righteous ones who die in the faith:

***The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them.
In the eyes of the foolish they seem to have died, and their departure was thought to be a disaster, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace.
For though in the sight of others they were punished, their hope is full of immortality.
Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself; like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them.
In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble.***

They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them forever.

Those who trust in God will understand truth, and the faithful will abide with him in love, because grace and mercy are upon his holy ones, and he watches over his elect.

(Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9)

Our epistle lesson is taken from the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 51-58:

Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed. In a Moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

And from the Gospel of John, chapter 6, verses 35 and verses 47-50, we read:

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never thirst....

Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

The Sermon:

(Note: For those who want to see and hear a video of the complete sermon you can find it on our church website or open the message that you will receive if you have given us your email address.)

There are those who would say that we only live through our memories, the places where our experiences are thought about and kept. And there are those who would say that the most basic form of spirituality is our remembrance of those who have guided us

along the way, then left us to live by their teachings and our memories of them. There is evidence for this, in the fact that ancient civilizations that had not developed yet a formal belief in God, held ancestors in high veneration – some would say worship; and there are many places in the world where both folk religion and institutionalized worship include the veneration of those who have been on the pathway of life before us.

I myself tend to trust such natural inclinations as this, and to believe that they have value, though it is something we Protestants sometimes treat lightly, perhaps as a leftover bias against the Catholic veneration of the saints. But the saints, understood in the more generalized sense, meaning ordinary but faithful Christian people who have held the community of Christ together through the ages, seem essential to me, as living members of the Body of Christ; so that being drawn to them is very like being drawn to God.

Though we do not designate and venerate some special saints like our brothers and sisters in Catholic tradition do, there are many of us who talk to our beloved who have passed, and even ask their advice and wisdom or seek the comfort of their love; and believe that we receive it. This is the personal dimension of the communion of the saints that we celebrate today. As I receive the Sacrament of bread and wine, it seems like the names of my beloved circle about my head; I find comfort in their presence, and the feeling seems to be one with the fellowship of Christ.

What deep gratitude we should feel for this sacred meal in fellowship with those we love, and for sharing the hospitality of the uniting table that welcomes us in memory at the fulfillment of our days. May this holy meal unite us for the work we are called to do, to bring the fellowship we know in Christ to bear upon the decisions, actions and dreams of our earthly days.

Solo:

“Wayfaring Stranger”

Paula Weil, soloist

The Sacrament of Holy Communion

Beloved, this is the holy feast of the Realm of God. We receive it in memory and in anticipation, because it is the banquet table set for us in the completion of time, that unites us with all who have gone before us and all who are still to come. Nothing is lost and no one is forgotten, because in Christ’s body we are one.

We receive this meal in the mystical body of Christ, whose Spirit makes us alive and whole, and as we are gathered around this table, we realize the unbroken fellowship of Christ created by God’s love poured out over all the ages.

Holy, Holy, Holy One who summons us with power from every age and place, the whole boundless world is full of the vision of your glory, and this broken world in which our lives are spent is moving silently toward your truth.

We remember how in a moment of time long ago our Lord took bread, and when he had given thanks he gave it to us, a symbol of his whole being shared among us. And after that, he took the wine, to represent God's sacrificial love poured out for the life of the world. We took it, and it tasted good, like mercy, on our lips. This meal we share, is it not the Word of God made flesh in us? This fellowship, is it not incarnate God in every place and time?

Take these elements, first the body given for us. Take and eat, remembering.

Take the cup, a covenant gift poured out for us. Take and drink, remembering.

Our Time of Prayer

We thank you, God, for this holy meal that signifies your fellowship of grace. We thank you for every soul remembered among us on this day. We thank you for the joy that we know and experience in the company of all the saints, and we thank you for all those special ones who are remembered by each of us as mentors, loved ones, just leaders and peacemakers. Today, we face many challenges as a people – a pandemic that has created loss and separation among us; a time of anxiety and anger within our nation's politics; feelings of instability in our lives and in our world; the persistent sin of racism among us, and communities suffering loss of homes and lives and environment to fire, wind and flood. May the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and the wisdom of the community of faith in times gone by continue to guide us through this time and encourage us to seek the hopefulness that lies sometimes hidden within these days.

Holy One, you have seen nations rise and fall, and still your vision does not fade. We are gathered today only two days away from our national elections. Grant us wisdom for this time, that we may choose well. Grant us confidence in the values of freedom and inclusion that animate our nation's spirit at its best. We pray your blessing upon all who serve the nation and all who have the courage to compete for public office. May your peace rest upon us all in these difficult times.

And we pray in the words of our Lord Jesus:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Our closing hymn today is a familiar song that celebrates the saints of every time and place.

*I sing a song of the saints of God, faithful their whole lives through,
who bravely labored and lived and died for the God they loved and knew.
And one was a doctor and one was a queen, and another a shepherd in pastures green
They were saints of God, if you know what I mean, God help me to be one too.*

*They loved their God and they lived that love. It was loving that made them strong.
They did what was right, for Jesus' sake, lived justly their whole lives long.
And one was a prophet and one was a priest, and another was slain by a fierce wild
beast;
There is no earthly reason, none in the least, why I shouldn't be one, too.*

*They lived not only in ages past, there are hundreds of thousands still.
The world is filled with living saints who choose to do God's will.
You can meet them in school, on the road, or at sea, in a church in a train, in a shop,
or at tea;
For the saints are folk like you and like me, and I mean to be one, too.*

Benediction:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.