

All Saints Day 2020 November 1st

1 st November All Saints Day	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Revelation 7 vv 2-12 Matthew 5 vv 1-12 p968
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O **ALMIGHTY** God, who hast knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord; Grant us grace so to follow thy blessed Saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys, which thou hast prepared for them that unfeignedly love thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

We're all in this together seems to have become a very common utterance on the part of politicians, journalists and other commentators. *We're all in this together.* Usually, they're talking about COVID 19. *We're all in this together.* From some people the frequent repetition of this expression elicits a cynical response. COVID does not affect all of us in the same way. It is more dangerous for the elderly, people with existing medical conditions, minority ethnics and the poor. Lockdown and other anti-COVID measures affect us in very different ways depending on how secure our income is, what sort of homes we live in, whom we live with, and the kind of people we are, whether we are naturally self-sufficient or whether we crave company. For some people, COVID has meant overwork. To others it has brought forced idleness. For many millions of people, anxiety levels have been raised enormously. And, for some of us, although we are embarrassed to admit it, it has not been all bad. If our income is secure, we live in nice houses in nice places and neither we nor those close to us get sick, working from home, increased leisure, more time with friends and family, the quieter, cleaner world we experienced when nasty, polluting traffic went away for a while, and a general fall in stress levels have more than compensated for any personal aggravation we might have experienced caused by the virus or the restrictions imposed on us in order to limit its spread.

We're all in this together. **O ALMIGHTY** God, who hast knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord; we prayed in today's collect. Doesn't that mean the same thing as *we're all in this together*. We all belong to the Church of God. We are all members. We are all family – *a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues.* All Christians on earth are one with one another. We are one with the saints in heaven. We are one with Christ. We really are all in this together, this being *the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.* Whatever the deficiencies of merely human associations and fellowships in terms of essential unity, the Church is one because Christ is one. The Church is a human association and fellowship, but she is more than that. She is a divine association and fellowship, the Bride of Christ, at one with Him in all eternity. All Christians everywhere partake of the same Holy Spirit. We are children of the same heavenly Father. As S Paul puts it in Ephesians 4⁴⁻⁶, *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

And what do we do who are *knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord*? We do what our Revelation reading says that God's people do. We worship God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Revelation is speaking of the worship of Heaven, but our worship on earth is at one with the worship of Heaven. *Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying: Holy, holy, holy.*

We are one with all Christians all over the world in heavenly worship. We are all in this together.

And what does this imply for the way we live our lives on earth. *O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.* The other morning, when I was out for a run in the fresh air with two dogs, and looking at the sun shining on the glorious colours of the autumn trees, I thought, *How could anyone possibly, adequately offer God thanks and praise for the wonders of this world which He has made?* The only way a man or a woman could even approach to offering God adequate praise would be to worship Him in the beauty of holiness, to offer to God a life lived in accordance with His commandments. God says to His people: *Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy* (Leviticus 19²). Our calling is to be like Him, to be perfect love. Something of what it means to be perfect love is set out in the Sermon on the Mount of which the beginning

forms today's Gospel reading. It continues for three chapters (Matthew chapters 5-7), Jesus explaining what it means to follow Him. In chapter 5 v48, He says, *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.* That is a big ask, something to aspire to, rather than a goal to which we can claim to have attained, an earnest of what is to come, rather than a consummation already arrived at. Permit me to quote from one of the post-Communion prayers in its traditional form, which is fuller and closer to the biblical original than the version we usually use. *And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee; humbly beseeching thee, that all we, who are partakers of this holy Communion, may be fulfilled with thy grace and heavenly benediction.*

Lives lived as an offering to God. We are all in this together. There is a solidarity with other Christians, a solidarity with Christ. In our experience of fellowship with Jesus and with one another, our unity in Him, we find the strength and support which we need to live our lives. As part of that fellowship in that *great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues*, we not only find the resources we need to sustain us, we are there for others too. We are here for others. S Paul says (Galatians 6²): *Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ.* We support one another in this congregation. We support other Christians in other congregations within this parish. We support other Christians in the diocese and in this country and overseas. And they support us. We support one another in prayer and fellowship and by the sharing of such resources as people, goods and money.

In v10 of Galatians 6, Paul goes on, *As we therefore have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.* Some Christians wince at what appears to be the suggestion that we should prioritise the needs of Christians over the needs of people who are not Christians. The way I look at it is this. Charity begins at home, but it does not stop there. Charity is love. God is love. The love of God which is shared by the three persons of the Trinity flows out from the Godhead to create, redeem and sanctify the world. The love of God fills our hearts such that our love overflows to love one another in the Church as Christ loved us. The love which fills the Church overflows to do God's work throughout the world, *to do good unto all men, as we have opportunity.* Among the fruits of this overflowing love are the different ways in which the Church has been caring for the wider community during the pandemic – prayer, foodbanks, looking out for neighbours, etc., all in this together. We certainly don't have a monopoly on good works. Plenty of people of all faiths and none are doing their bit. But it is intrinsic to what we are as Christians, to be in it together, all of us doing our bit. The Son of God entered our world and became one with us in order to serve us by bringing us the love of God. He commissions us, His people, dwelling in the world as we do, in solidarity with one another and with all people on earth, to serve human beings in every kind of need, sharing the good things God has given us in all the circumstances of our lives.

We really are all in this together - praising God together, sustained by our fellowship one with another, called to work together to accomplish God's purposes for the Creation of which we are part.