



by Jonathon Krenz

All Saints' Day 101

My dad died when I was a 24-year-old seminary student. Life was just beginning for me or so it seemed. I had just met the woman I would marry, was on the cusp of vicarage and had call day in sight. Then came the 4 a.m. phone call and the sad flight home to bury the man who gave me life and taught me how to live, the man who brought me to the baptismal font as a newborn and taught me about Jesus.

The funeral was a tremendous confession of faith. The pastor proclaimed Christ crucified and the resurrection of the dead. His body will rise. We will see Dad again, with our own eyes, standing and singing before the throne. And in the meantime, he still joins us here, at the altar, “with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.” The Scriptures, the liturgy,

the hymns — they all hit on this theme: Christ is risen. He will raise Dad. He will raise you. Shed your tears now, but God will wipe them away on Resurrection Day, when death shall be no more (*REV. 21:4*).

Remembering the saints

All Saints' Day, like the Christian funeral, is given to confess the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. It is a day of comfort for those who “feebley struggle” here while their loved ones “in glory shine” (*LSB 677:4*). We miss those who have fallen asleep in the Lord, but we know that, though they have died, yet they live, and they are with Jesus: “Now safely home in endless day” (*LSB 676:3*). They are in heaven.

But that isn’t the whole story. Jesus will raise their bodies from the grave on the Last Day.

On All Saints' Day, we mock death and spit in his eye. Christ is risen. We will rise.

Body and soul will be reunited to live with God in ceaseless joy in a new heavens and a new earth. On All Saints' Day, the Scriptures, the liturgy, the hymns and the preaching all hit on this theme. It is the yearly feast commemorating all who have died in Christ and now rest from their labors. It reminds us that the risen Lord, Jesus Christ, will raise them from the dead.

He will raise you as well. That is the other theme of All Saints' Day. Unless the Lord returns first, you will physically die. This is the common experience of all children of Adam. The wages of sin is death (**ROM. 6:23**). All sinners must die. But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ. This gift is for you, just as it is for your loved ones who have gone before. Jesus died for you to take your sins away. He died your death. Now death cannot have you. You belong to Jesus, who is risen from the dead. In Baptism, He gives you His life. All Saints' Day is a little preview of your funeral. Your body will rise!

We are with them

In the meantime, the Church in heaven and the Church on earth is one holy Christian Church. We gather around one Lord, Jesus Christ, who breathes into us, on both sides of death's veil, the very breath of life — His Word and Spirit — and feeds us His risen and living body and blood. The early Christians confessed this reality by worshiping in the catacombs (underground cemeteries). Christians today sometimes build cemeteries in the churchyard. The dead are not gone from us. They are still members of the Church. We are with them when we gather around the altar. We are with them when we are where Jesus is, giving His gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation.

Very early in the history of the Christian Church, in the wake of persecution and martyrdom, various feasts were established here and there commemorating all the saints who are with Christ, those known and those unknown. By the eighth century, November 1 was established in the West as the annual observance of the Feast of All Saints. Here we see the wisdom of the ancient Church Fathers. Our common enemy is death. On All Saints', we mock death and spit in his eye. Christ is risen. We will rise. The risen Christ stops death in its tracks. Our loved ones will be given back to us — alive, healed and whole. That means my dad. That means your loved ones who are with the Lord and all the saints now safely home in endless day. That means you. We long for that day. Come, Lord Jesus. **LW**

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The Rev. Jonathon Krenz (*jkrenz98@hotmail.com*) is associate pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church, Seattle, Wash.

