*For all the saints who from their labors rest,*

*Who Thee by faith before the world confess,*

*Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest,*

*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! In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen*

And a blessed All Saints' Sunday to you! All Saints Day, as you probably know already, is actually on the first day of November. I'm grateful that we were able to observe and enjoy a robust All Hallows' Tide earlier in the week. I love that the feast is important enough that the Book of Common Prayer actually recommends that parishes observe All Saints' on that day or on the Sunday following. This little, tiny season gives me the opportunity to exhort and encourage the saints among and around us here at our great parish even as it gives all of the opportunity the remember the saints that have gone before us; the famous ones from the Church's long tradition, and the less famous ones that are more beloved in our own families' history. All Saints' is an opportunity to reflect on glory of God made known by His Holy People, to rejoice in the example they've left for us, and to look forward to what God will do in and through us.

So, on a day where we are meant to be super pumped about the saints, their ministry, and the ongoing work of God in the Church, it might seem a little odd at first to hear about poor Lazarus' weeping and wailing family and then his gross and smelly dead body. But this episode in Bethany as absolutely packed with details for the saints to consider both about themselves and about the Lord of the Saints, Jesus.

First, let's take a look at the people around Jesus and see what we can learn from them. I, for one, love how close Mary is to Jesus. St. John especially takes the time to let his readers know that Jesus and this family were very close. But what I love about their relationship in this particular text is how Mary interacts with Jesus: even as she kneels at his feet in the depths of grief, she presents Jesus with a very real scenario: that if he'd been around a little earlier, Lazarus would be alive. She was certainly confident in Jesus' power to heal, she was justifiably upset at the loss of her brother and approached Jesus without much ceremony. I think that this sort of confidence and intimacy is just right for how the saints, how we, can approach Jesus in our hardest moments. And for Jesus' part, he responded immediately, weeping along the way just as he weeps with us when we ourselves are troubled. He approached Lazarus and after a prayer to the Father, commanded the dead man to come out of the tomb. "Lazarus come out!" he yelled, and Lazarus emerged alive again. When I reflect on the Christian life, caught in the snare of my own sin and in bondage to death, I often consider this text; hoping that I can partner with grace to follow Jesus out of the cave for at Christ's command, we can be released from the tombs of our transgression and unbound from the encumbrances that death has on us. The saints, beloved, are the people who are aware of Christ's goodness, confident in his power to save, and who have followed his voice out of the tombs that the world has hewn for us.

This story also shows the depths of Christ's real regard for us. When we read the Gospel stories, we see Jesus at work throughout his mission field. He taught with authority, cast out devils, and performed signs and healings. He certainly showed how much he cared for his friends and neighbors by his actions. But here in today's lesson, we get a kind of rare insight into Jesus' emotional life. Jesus wept at the death of his friend, he was disturbed by what was happening around him, and he grieved with the grieving community. Again, I think this is a perfect image for how Jesus responds when we approach him in our own pain. Jesus knows our suffering, and instead of remaining aloof, sends the Divine presence of the Holy Spirit to comfort us in the depths of our hearts. And even as he walked through the valley of grief with his friends at Bethany, he was still in command of life. To me, that blessed combination of tenderness and strength is an image of the very unique savior we find Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God. Again, he knows our suffering as one of us, but even as such commanded the fullness of deity's power. The saints are those that put their trust in the Incarnate Word, who appreciate the humanity of Jesus and enjoy his divinity for what it has wrought in what new life he gives to those that love him.

Beloved, to be saints is to know Jesus as a friend, close as family like his friends in Bethany did. And to be saints is to know that Jesus serves us as Incarnate Lord and Savior, again, just as in Bethany. This depth of relationship, this knowledge of his humility and power is our great comfort and our message to the world, Good News to share with any who would listen with hearts open. Our own hearts, opened by God's grace stand as invitations to any who would come to know God's love in Christ. That's among the reasons that Baptisms are so appropriate during All Saints', as Baptism is the sacrament of welcome into Christ's kingdom of the redeemed. And today, even though we await baptismal candidates for a later date, we can still renew our own baptismal vocation, ready to receive the grace to live into that vocation as we are confident in Jesus' salvation for us and presence with us as his Holy Ones.

In closing out this little All Saints season, we start looking forward to the celebration of Christ’s reign and indeed the new beginning of Advent. In just a few short weeks, the liturgical year begins anew, and I pray that reminds us of the pattern and rhyme of our work as Christian Saints. I pray that we will continually call on God to remind us of the universe of goodness and peace that he means for us, so that we can help bring that to fruition around us as enabled by His mighty grace.

To Christ, the Lord of the Saints, indeed be all glory. Amen.