

All Saints/All Souls Sunday 2006, 5.xi.05, 10:00 EST  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania  
Isaiah 25:6-9, Psalm 24, Revelation 21:1-6a, John 11:32-44  
Holy Eucharist · LBW Setting 2 · Lighting of Memorial Candles

J. J. !

GRACE TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR FATHER  
AND FROM OUR LORD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST!

✠ AMEN.

Then He said to me: "It is done!  
I am the Alpha and the Omega,  
the Beginning and the End."

—Revelation 21:6a

This is the Sunday following All Saints Day,  
November 1<sup>st</sup>, and All Souls, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, and, as  
last year, it is the Sunday preceding Veteran's Day,  
originally called 'Armistice Day' to mark the armistice  
that effected a cease-fire on all battle fronts in the  
World War I, a document signed at 11:00 a.m.,

Central European Time, on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month of the year 1918. As I said a year ago of All Saints Sunday 2005, it is a Sunday falling between heaven and hell, the heaven of the Church Triumphant and the hell of war.

I am sure that those who lived in full awareness of the destruction of the so-called 'Great War,' people of humane sensitivity in the world over, those who had already lost loved ones whose remains they might never be able to reclaim and, above all, those whose loved ones were still serving under arms or the soldiers and other personnel serving at the front themselves must have stood in breathless hope that the imperfect peace of that 11<sup>th</sup> hour of that 11<sup>th</sup> day of that particular 11<sup>th</sup> month would hold, that the end of

unrelenting war would be the beginning of peace without end. But the peace did not hold. The cease fire, made law by a thoroughly unjust treaty, simply imposed the conditions on the vanquished that gave rise to a war of a magnitude of terror and brutality far in excess of that of the 'Great' War. And, there has been war after that, and after that, and again and again and again, and now we are at war again, but this time without even the possibility of an end in sight, no matter what the politicians promise they will do.

Armistice Day, which we have domesticated into 'Veterans Day' by keeping it months apart from Memorial Day, is a memorial to all of humanity's broken dreams. There has, of course, been

many an armistice and many a treaty since then, but always and only as a prelude to the next war, and the next, and always the next. No one bothers to observe those dates much. It is always the same story. Though wars have been prevented and their barbarism sometimes limited by courageous and far-sighted people who love goodness and their fellow creatures, and by very many of them who fear and love God, it seems that even nations of good will, if there are any of those left, find themselves at war again and again, unable to avoid it, able only to fight with honor, and perhaps not even with that.

The Catholic Christian Festivals of All Saints and All Souls form a very different sort of observance from that of Armistice Day. For the

details, I would refer you to my church newsletter article rather than take up more time here. The point it seems important to stress here and now is this: By contrast with November 11<sup>th</sup>, a date that marks the beginning of a whole succession of heartbreaking disappointments that continue unabated, November 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> form a two-day festival of *hope*, the Christian hope.

What is that hope? It is not the hope that things might turn out better in the future either for humankind collectively or for you or me individually.

It is not a hope that any of us are going to make it out of this world alive. It is not a hope that rewrites history or that negates or minimizes the suffering which dates like November 11<sup>th</sup>, or the death dates of those

we love who are no longer with us in our daily lives mean, pretending that nothing has changed. No, the hope we have in the Crucified and Risen Christ, Son of God and Son of Mary, is genuine *hope*. It is a way of living in time different from that of the world apart from faith that God has entered our time. It is, I have come to see—and someday I may by God's grace even come fully to *accept*—living on two planes of time at once.

The first I have said enough about in connection with November 11<sup>th</sup>, existing on the plane of events, being born, aging, if we are so blessed, and dying, or experiencing the joy of a little peace in the world, only to see that joy overturned by the return of the scourge of war. That is ordinary, human time, the

time of the world, the way we mark time, from event to event, from joy to catastrophe. But there is, for those who have known love, for those whose hearts have opened to another in a moment that cannot be repeated or for those who have lost a friend, a beloved companion on this life's path and so have lost that companion's company, voice, touch, humor, wit or even anger or biting sarcasm for which you or I would be grateful if we could experience *anything* of the one we



miss but silence, there is for us, for all who will light candles of remembrance here and before every Altar in the world, a different experience of time, because for us time has, at one

level, at a level that feels real because it *is* real, come to a full *halt*. Time has *stopped*.



I am so grateful to the Church and thankful to God that the Church our wise Mother understands this, and that she has set aside this day and this time to mark that time which does *not* go forward where the ones who no longer mark the days with us are concerned. The Sacred Liturgy, at the time of death and as we commend the one who has died to the keeping of the Triune God, and also on this day, makes time for that love which still treasures the past but which can have no present, no walking together from hour-to-hour and day-to-day.

In his novel, *Mother Night*, Kurt Vonnegut's central character, Howard W. Campbell, Jr., finds himself standing motionless on a New York City sidewalk. His beloved wife, Helga, with whom he had built what they called together "our nation of two," had died, he thought, while entertaining frontline troops during the Second World War. Just a few weeks before this terrible day, she had returned, and it seemed his life was full again. Then after a week or more, Helga informs Howard that she was not Helga at all, but rather her younger sister, Resi. Before the husband, now a widower again, has had a chance to work through this knowledge, he will witness the death of his sister-in-law, who was willing to take the place of her elder sister. Now, in a world *completely*

emptied of both his beloved *and* of the one who tried to play her part, it occurs to him that there is no reason to walk forward, or backward, to sit or to speak, and so he stands there, not realizing he is standing right in front of own his apartment house, until, hours later, after night has fallen, a policeman helps him inside. That is grief as at least some of us experience it. Time does *not* go forward because it is now *empty* time, time without the one who had walked with us or whom we had held and helped along up until that one, awful day.

The Church on earth literally stops on this day, making room in her great cyclic calendar to remember her own dead and to remember that, for each and every one of them, time *stopped* in the lives

of those closest to them, of the mothers who gave them birth, of the parents who raised them, of the siblings who thought of them as extensions of themselves, of the spouses who pledged their lives to those no longer living, to the children who will always miss their voice and hug and kiss or wonder what any of those would have been like. At our Synod Assembly yesterday, a very kind and Christian soul in our Synod office asked me, and not for the first time, how I and my family were doing after the passing of



my daughter, and then she asked, "Has it been a year yet?" When I reminded her that it had been nearly *two* years, she was amazed. "Where

does the time go?" she asked. Only later did I think

of the correct reply: That's o.k. It doesn't seem like two years, or one, or three, or any time at all. The time doesn't go anywhere. It *stops*, no matter what the calendar says.

But, of course it doesn't entirely. It can't. That is the maddening thing about having to reenter the traffic pattern of the world of chronological time. No one out there seems to notice, and those who dawdle motionlessly are quite frankly and quite understandably resented. That is because they can't stand still when they are trying to move forward, to do real work, to provide for real needs and as many wants as they can manage, to fight figurative battles wars and, please God, to avert real ones. Even the Church on earth is like this. She is not called the *Ecclesia*

*militans*, the 'Church militant' for nothing. There is business to be conducted and there are missions to be accomplished in obedience to the command of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Even the grieving Christian is not exempt from the spiritual warfare in which the whole Body of Christ is engaged. Even the grieving Christian who would like to remain in that time of memory, to which few if any others have access, must know his or her duty and *do it*.

The art of the Christian life, after grief has marked it, after All Saints and All Souls has become a *personal* observance, is to do both, if not simultaneously then in a kind of balance, with a certain grace that bears the unmistakable imprint of the grace of God. The key to that art, or so it seems to me, is *hope*, the

hope we have in Jesus Christ. Hope is not simply something to look forward to, though it is that. All conflict, all barriers to love, all separation between loved ones that death can erect having been thoroughly demolished by Christ, our hope is in a future that *already includes the very one whose passing away has emptied my future of meaning and purpose.* It is a hope we in fact *possess, together, now,* which we see by faith just as they once saw it but now know it through joy, just as surely as the same moon shines on the faces of those separated by oceans and continents but united in heart. And so we can take the next step, and the next, with purpose and with good hope until our life's end. The past will always belong to us, to the Church on earth and the Church in heaven, to

the Church militant and the Church triumphant, and, though we do not any longer have today or tomorrow to do with as we wish, we possess the future together in hope. ✠ Amen.



NOW TO HIM WHO LOVES US AND HAS FREED US FROM YOUR SINS BY HIS BLOOD, TO HIM BE GLORY AND DOMINION WITH THE FATHER AND THE HOLY SPIRIT, NOW AND FOREVER! ✠ AMEN.

