

On the surface, it's just a matter of timing. In reality, the problem goes much deeper. At the center of the controversy is a Federal Agency that everyone loves to hate: the Postal Service. After years of cost-cutting the Post Office is now, “contending with angry customers whose mail is taking longer — sometimes much longer — to arrive.”¹ And last month the Postal Service may have messed up with the wrong person. A private investigator in Louisiana purchased a pair of binoculars for work. And the Post Office failed on their 2-day delivery guarantee. To make it worse, they sent the guy a couple of messages saying they attempted delivery when the resident wasn't home. But this is a P.I. He has time-stamped surveillance footage of his own property. He can prove that no delivery attempts were ever made.²

On the surface, it's just a matter of timing. In reality, the problem goes much deeper. Congressional research suggests, “the post office's tracking system ... is so unreliable that there's no way to [even] know how late [some] mail really is.”³ In reality, the problem is about budgets & staffing; infrastructure & technology. It's about the lack of reliable information to even know what's going on. And it's those deeper problems that cause some people to lose **faith** in the Post

¹ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/federal-eye/wp/2015/10/05/the-mail-could-be-taking-even-longer-to-be-delivered-than-the-postal-service-is-saying/>

² <https://www.wvltv.com/article/news/local/lakeview-residents-question-false-us-post-office-delivery-alerts/289-603562058>

³ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/federal-eye/wp/2015/10/05/the-mail-could-be-taking-even-longer-to-be-delivered-than-the-postal-service-is-saying/>

Office. It's those deeper problems that cause some people to lose **hope** in the future of mail delivery. It's those deeper problems that cause some people to lose **charity** and to support efforts for change. On the surface, it may just be matter of timing. But in reality, there's **a crisis of faith, hope & love.**

For some of us, the Feast of All Saints, can feel the same way. All Saints is a celebration of all God's people in all places & all ages. In one of our Eucharistic Prayers (Prayer D), we ask God, "that we may find our inheritance with all the saints who have found favor with you in ages past." And we don't just leave it there in the past. We're not simply admiring the dead. We continue that prayer by affirming, "We praise you in union with them," (BCP, 375). We pray with all the people of God – both the living & the dead – to the living God who holds us all in his hand.

One theologian suggest, the main benefit, "of commemorating the saints," is that through them we recognize Jesus, "who never leaves us without a witness."⁴ You see ultimately the Feast of All Saints is like any other Christian feast. It's about Jesus. It's not about any of us. Today we're celebrating & participating in our witness to the work of Christ. But for some of us there's also a **problem**. Here it is: if we're celebrating God's rescue, redemption & salvation of both the living & the dead, then **why is God taking so long to deliver?** C'mon, it's been 2,000 years

⁴ White, J. F. *Introduction to Christian Worship*.

since the resurrection of Jesus & God's victory over death. Why is God taking so long to make everything right? **That's the problem on the surface. And for some of us the reality goes even deeper.** In reality, the problem of All Saints is about the seemingly endless cycle of suffering, tragedy & despair of our world. It's about violence not just on battlefields, but in churches, synagogues, and mosques. It's about illness & death. It's about some of the funerals we've had right here at St. C's that leave gaping holes in grieving families. We're longing for reliable information to know what God is even up to & (literally) what in the world is going on.

It's the reality of those deeper problems that cause some people to lose **faith** in God. It's those deeper problems that cause some of us to lose **hope** for a better future. It's those deeper problems that cause some of us to lose **charity** - or love – and to work for change in the world. On the surface, the “problem” of All Saints Day may just be matter of timing but in reality, **but for some of us, there's a crisis of faith, hope & love.**

Today we're invited to acknowledge that crisis but we don't simply leave it there. Today, in the midst of any sorrow or tragedy, we're invited to **open ourselves again to the Christian virtues of faith, hope & love.** They're called theological virtues, “because they are formed in us by the grace of God.”⁵ They're

⁵ *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, p. 813.

never something we achieve. They're gifts from God that allow us to participate in life with God.⁶ St. Paul loves talking about faith, hope & love. He does it so much they're enshrined in memorials like our stained-glass window here at church. The next time you read one of Paul's letters (as you all do...); next time play a little game and see if you can find the theological virtues of faith, hope, & love.

He often inserts them at the beginning of a letter, saying things like, "We heard about your **faith** in Christ Jesus and the **love** that you have for all the saints, because of the **hope** reserved for you in heaven," (Col. 1:4-5). He introduces the virtues and unpacks them over the course of a letter. Bc for Paul the entire Christian life is grounded in these divine gifts of faith, hope, and love. They belong together and if any of Paul's churches get off track, he reminds them of their true identity as people of faith, hope & love.

The **Thessalonians** have a problem with suffering, so Paul says, "don't grieve as those without hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again, so, through Jesus, God will bring with him all those who have died," (1Thess. 4:13-14). The **Corinthians** have a problem with love. The **Galatians** are in a real mess about faith. So Paul writes letters reminding them about their identity in Christ. It was true for Paul's churches and it's also true for us. Almost any of our difficulties at church can be traced to some deficiency in faith, hope, or love.

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd Ed.

Today is our invitation to be nourished again; to let God fill us with the gifts of our baptism; faith, hope & love. So let's dive in. Our first reading from **Wisdom of Solomon** points the way. You may have been surprised when you saw this reading bc Wisdom of Solomon isn't even officially part of our Bible. It's one of those readings we call the Apocrypha - the Jr. Varsity of Christian Scripture. That doesn't mean it's dangerous. We just read it on a different register than Scripture. The reason today's reading makes an appearance in our lectionary is that it offers a striking, poetic, beautiful description of **faith**.

The key for Solomon is that **faith requires a different vision**; a vision capable of seeing beyond what he describes as "the eyes of the foolish" (3:2), where foolish means something like "looking on the surface." Most people look at death and all they see is loss - "they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be an affliction," (3:2). No, says Solomon - "they are at peace" (3:3), "their hope is full of immortality" (3:4). "The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God and no torment will ever touch them," (Wis. 3:1; cf. Phil. 1.23). It's a beautiful passage, but Solomon knows we struggle to sustain that kind of faith. So at the very end of the passage he reminds us, only "those who trust in [God] will understand," (3:9). In other words, only those who receive faith as a gift will find it sustaining them in the midst of loss & sorrow.

They're beautiful words, but challenging. And if we struggle with that, if

that's just not where we are right now; if trusting God with our deepest loss or sorrow just feels too hard, that's okay. Our second reading has words of encouragement in the midst of our struggles. Our second reading from the Apocalypse, or Revelation, is all about **hope**. Today's vision in Revelation grows directly out of the Lord's Prayer, that famous prayer Jesus taught his disciples: thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (Mt. 6). The Lord's Prayer and the Revelation show us that Christian hope includes the arrival of God's presence here on earth.

I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for a husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them ... God himself will be with them," (Rev 21:2-4)

Revelation flips the script that many of us have gotten used to. Christian hope isn't about escaping the world. It's about God's rescue, consolation, & transformation of the world. Christian hope is about God coming to us. I love what Eugene Peterson says. He suggests that Revelation's vision of a heavenly city hints that maybe heaven itself is quarried, as he puts it, out of the very marble and granite⁷ of our brokenness. Bc hope is the virtue by which we come to know that

⁷ Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 175.

“everything in history is retrievable.”⁸ Nothing is lost for the God who says, “I am making all things new,” (Rev. 21.5).

Which brings us to Christian **love**. Love is the “virtue by which we love God above all things”⁹ simply because God is God. We don’t do it to get anything. It isn’t manipulative or self-serving. We simply love God, who is God. And then to our surprise, we discover this love, which isn’t used to get anything, becomes the very soil for new life.

Look at the **Gospel**. When Mary & Martha come to Jesus, they’re in the depth of pain & despair. It’s a grave problem (pun intended). On the surface, you could say, it’s just a matter of timing. A few days earlier they told Jesus that Lazarus was sick. And instead of coming right away, he waited. Jesus took longer than the Post Office. He took so long Lazarus died. That’s the surface problem, but of course, the reality goes deeper. In reality their problem with Jesus is about friendship and betrayal, about family & trust, it’s about having reliable information to even understand what kind of person would allow that to happen. Jesus, what in the world is going on? That’s their problem.

It’s a crisis of faith, hope & love. Now that Lazarus is dead, faith & hope are gone. **The only thing left is the tattered remains of wounded love**; both the

⁸ Ibid., p. 177.

⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd Ed.

wounded love of Mary & Martha and also the wounded love of Jesus himself, who weeps in the face of death. And then to everyone's amazement, when Jesus arrives that wounded love itself becomes a wellspring of new life.

It's a story of resurrection. It's the story we're invited into by these Christian virtues of faith, hope & love. All Saints is an invitation to bring any crisis or suffering into this story of hopelessness, despair, and wounded love. It's an invitation to have our eyes opened in **faith** (when Jesus begins crying for us). It's an invitation to have our **hope** renewed (when we hear that Jesus loves us too). It's an invitation to rest in the **loving** arms of Jesus when he beckons us "out" of the shadow of suffering.

Don't miss this closing detail. Jesus gives Lazarus life. But all he can do by himself is shuffle out of a tomb still bound in his grave clothes. Jesus gives the gathered community the awesome responsibility of unbinding Lazarus & releasing him into that new life. That's our work friends, as we journey together in the fellowship of Jesus. Jesus gives life, we're invited to help each other in our weaknesses and to release one another into the new life of Jesus.¹⁰

Where are you hurting today? Where is your crisis of faith, hope, or love? Where does sorrow or death have a grip on your life? Today, hear the gift of Jesus who calls you to new life and invites you into community where each of us have

¹⁰ cf., Burridge, *John: Daly Bible Commentary*, 149.

the awesome responsibility of unbinding & liberating our brothers & sisters into
the life of Jesus.

We're going to sing the last 2 verses of our Gospel Hymn (335). Make these
verses your prayer.