

May I speak in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We're celebrating today All Saints' Day, which is a big and significant festival in the life of the church. And what's distinctive about this festival is it's the only day in the year that we celebrate something of which we are a part, that we are not just remembering those who've gone before us, saints who lived a great life, that we remember too that we are numbered amongst the saints. We're celebrating a communion of saints, of which we are a part. See how Paul uses the word "saints" in the extract we read from the book of Ephesians, which is the passage to which I'll be referring this morning. He talks about their love towards all the saints, and he often begins letters by saying, "Greet all the saints in Ephesus or Corinth." Saints was the word that they used which we still use for members of Christ's community, both here and in the life to come. We're united in that great mystical body and communion of saints. All God's people, the living and the great, and those in glory, are united in the company of the saints, which has big implications for all of us.

You are a saint, perhaps even more startling, the people sitting alongside you in the pews are saints also, which calls to mind in the old adage "to live above with saints we love. Ah, indeed that will be glory. To live below with saints we know. Well, that's a different story." To put it another way, church is a home for sinners and a school for saints. We're all learning how to live as better saints.

And as I mentioned, I want to stay with and focus on that magnificent passage from Ephesians that is set as our epistle today, which is St. Paul writing at his most wonderful and deep and profound, and I want to draw out three things that he says about what it means to live as a saint. And it's all pretty meaty stuff.

Three words recur several times in the passage. I don't know if you noticed, but there are three words that come time and again. And the words are these: inheritance, riches and power. Let me begin by talking about what St. Paul sees as the inheritance of the Saints, of our inheritance in Christ Jesus. You'll see the passage begins by Paul saying that "we in Christ have obtained an inheritance". And in the next paragraph he emphasizes this point and talks about "the riches of God's glorious inheritance among the saints". Many of us are concerned at the moment about our material

inheritance. We see these dwindling in the current economic conditions.

I read a very scary statistic recently about the economic rule of 72. I don't know if you've heard about it. It's normally good news, but not in times of inflation. The rule of 72 means that if you inherited a million dollars today at an inflation rate of 6%, you divide by 72 by six, which is 12, which means that in 12 years, your \$1 million today will buy the equivalent of only \$500,000 of stuff in 12 years' time. But our spiritual inheritance is inflation-proof, unlike a material inheritance. St. Peter writes this in his letter, "God has given us new birth into a living hope and into an inheritance, which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading."

I read a story once about a young man who was estranged from his family, and he went off for years on his own and he arrived once in Pennsylvania. I don't know why he was there, but he was there, and he stayed for a year begging on the streets and one day he touched the shoulder of a man and said, "Mister, can you spare me a dime?" The man turned around and looked at him and the young man realized that this was his father. And the father looked at him, put his arms around him and said, "Give you a dime? I'll give you everything. I've been looking for you for 18 years. Everything I have is yours."

Which brings back an image of that great story of the prodigal son where the son goes back home thinking he might be treated as a servant and the father welcomes him home, throws a party and treats him as his son. The father in both stories is one who represents abundance, wants to give everything to the son when they come home, when they see the error of their ways. Our heavenly Father is characterized by such abundance. He offers us everything. Our inheritance in Christ is rich and full.

In the verses before the passage that we are looking at, Paul talks about the riches of God's grace that God has "lavished on us", which is an interesting choice of words. And in the verse that follows, he talks about the "immeasurable riches of God's grace and kindness", words which speak and depict God's abundance. And in the intervening verses, Paul spells out the nature of that abundant inheritance. "In Jesus, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace." Redemption, forgiveness, grace. We can add hope to the list. "The hope, Paul says, to which he has called you." Peace. The

list goes on. This is our spiritual inheritance in Christ Jesus. An abundant list.

So often, like the young man in that story I just told, we're busy searching for a material dime, when God wants to lavish on us his immeasurable riches of His huge abundance of his inheritance. How often do we miss that abundance that God is offering us? That inheritance that we have in Christ Jesus?

The last thing I'd say about inheritance is this. Paul says that "when you believed you were marked with a seal of God's promised Holy Spirit," which is the pledge of our inheritance. We are marked people; we are marked with the spirit. God's spirit dwells within all the saints of God. The Spirit marks us out as God's own, as the recipient of that abundance inheritance.

Which leads me to the final meaty word of this passage, which I want to draw out. We're to live as saints of God in the power of the spirit. The spirit equips us and empowers us to walk God's ways. This word is so central that Paul uses it three times in the space of less than two sentences. You might notice this. He talks of "The immeasurable greatness of God's power, for us who believe according to the workings of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised Jesus from the dead." That's a huge, incredible claim that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power of the spirit that God places into us his people. And he means that because he says it again in the book of Romans. "Paul writes this, 'The spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by the same spirit living in you.'"

That same divine power that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us. How often do we feel that to be true? How often do we feel spiritually powerful? Maybe we need to learn to draw on the power of that spirit which dwells in each one of us, which takes our life up. But we don't need to live the Christian life, the life of saints under our own steam. There is a power source available to us in God's spirit.

There was a missionary called Herbert Jackson who arrived in a new posting. I don't know where it was, but I do know the posting came with a car and Herbert Jackson found out that the car wasn't completely reliable. And so every morning he had to get his wife and kids out to help push the car to get it going. And he

found that once he got it going, it was okay if he parked on a downhill spot. Whenever he parked the car, he parked downhill so that when he had to get back in the car, he could just use the hill to get him going instead of being pushed. And he'd worked out a way that everywhere he went, he knew a downhill parking spot which he could rely on. So, when after two years his successor came to the posting, he was very proud of the fact. He said, "Well, there's a house and there's a car, but I've worked out how to use this car."

And he showed you all the parking spaces. And the successor was a bit more technologically with it than Herbert Jackson, so he lifted up the hood and fiddled about and said, "Well, the problem here is you've got a loose connection." So, he just tightened a couple of screws and lo and behold, the car started perfectly. So Herbert Jackson had spent two years suffering because of a loose connection. And he'd thought he'd been so clever and cunning to find this way of getting the car working, but all the time if he'd just made that connection, he wouldn't have had the problem. And aren't we so often like that? If we had that strong connection with God, if we could draw on that power, how different life would be? And yet we've all got our very cunning schemes and ways of getting through life, relying on our own resources, not staying connected to the divine power which inspires us and enables us and equips us to walk God's ways. We need to be sure to draw on God's power, the power of the Spirit that dwells in each one of us.

So, there's a lot for us to take in this All Saints' Day. I've been talking about inheritance, riches and power, which serves to show how distinctive we are as God's people, as Christians, as God's saints. But also, this discussion shows how different the way of the saints is to the way of the world. When everyone else is worried about their inheritance dwindling, we can be confident that our spiritual inheritance is secure. At a time of recession, our riches are abundant, and in the midst of an energy crisis, we have a power supply that is everlasting.

Amen.