



All Saints' Day Pastoral Letter

The Episcopal Diocese of Missouri

November 1, 2020

The Feast of All Saints

"Jesus said, 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'" –John 13:34-35

Dear siblings in the Risen Christ,

As the Church throughout the world celebrates the Feast of All Saints, we are reminded of the holy women and holy men who have gone before us in faith. They have followed, as best they could, in the footsteps of our Savior Jesus Christ and sought to love God, love their neighbors, and love themselves. We are now called for such a time as this to build on the legacy of those who have gone before.

While none of us could have imagined the times in which we find ourselves, we look to the examples of the lives of the saints that have reflected the love of God that continues to work in, through, and among us. The saints have taught us that even in the face of tremendous hardship the love of God behind us is far greater than the challenges ahead of us.

We continue to see a dramatic increase in cases of COVID-19 in the State of Missouri and across the world and the economic, financial, and mental uncertainty that it has caused. We continue to live in a time of reckoning with systematic racism in our nation. We continue to see fear and division wielded as a weapon by political parties and politicians as we approach Election Day. We are tired. We are weary. We are worn.

Like you, I long to gather with the people of God to join in the symphony of worship as we sing our faith. Like you, I long for a time when we are all judged by the content of our character and not the color of our skin. Like you, I long for a time when civility and decency are a part of our political discourse and fear and division give way to "from many, one."

While we cannot predict what will come of this time of upheaval in our lives, in our communities of faith, or in the world, we know that the steadfast love of God never ceases. God has been, God is, and God will be our refuge and strength. We know that this pandemic will end and we will gather in worship and songs of praise. We know that the work of racial reconciliation and healing will one day be achieved. We know the season of political division will come to a close.

It is important to us as followers of Jesus Christ to remember and hold fast to the understanding that even in the midst of fear we are called to be a people of love. St. Paul in his writings reminds, "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."¹ We know that love is the way and that perfect love will cast out fear. The question is, are we willing to allow ourselves to be people rooted and grounded in a love that is far greater than our fear?

No matter when this pandemic ceases, no matter at what time we are reconciled one to another, no matter the outcome of the election, the work of Christ's Church continues. Like the saints who have gone before us, we must be about the work of bringing good news to the poor, setting the captives free, healing the sick, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, loving our neighbors, and proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ. Now more than ever, as people of faith, we are called to be bearers of hope and ambassadors of God's wild and radical love.

As we face these challenges together, bearing one another's burdens, I encourage you to join with your siblings in Christ across the Diocese of Missouri and across the Church in being about the work of building the Beloved Community in this time and place. Over the next few days, weeks, and months I invite you to join me in doing three things: pray, act, and care. Pray that we may together endure this time of pandemic and safely gather in worship. Act for the cause of justice and racial harmony. Care especially for those with whom we disagree.

We may be tired, weary, and worn, yet like the saints who have gone before, we walk together in love as Christ loved us and gave himself for us. May we in the midst of all that surrounds us, keep our eyes and hearts firmly fixed on Jesus the Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

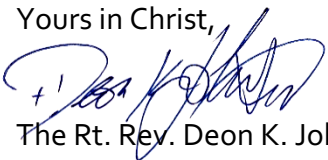
Let us pray.

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated unto you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

-Book of Common Prayer 1979 Page 832

May God bless and keep you and those whom you love, and together may we live and know, as St. Julian of Norwich reminds us, "all shall be well. And all shall be well. And all manner of things shall be well."

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Deon K. Johnson".

The Rt. Rev. Deon K. Johnson
XI Bishop of Missouri

¹ 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 New Revised Standard Version