

**Sermon Preached by The Rev. John Perris,
Rector, Anglican/Episcopal Church of Christ the King, Frankfurt am Main,
during the Commemoration Service of
The Church of St. Augustine of Canterbury, Wiesbaden
on the Feast of All Saints, November 1, 2014**

Happy Anniversary! Happy All Saints' Day!

What a joy and an honor it is for me to join you in this Commemoration Service! My thanks go out to all of you and especially, to Fr. Chris for inviting me to this service.

It is a joy and an honor to be the preacher at this special service. The joy is personal, but the honor is official!

What I mean is that I am your preacher, this morning, not because I am John Perris, but rather because I am the Rector of the Anglican / Episcopal Church of Christ the King in Frankfurt. And as the Rector of that parish, I am – in a nebulous way – the heir of The Rev. J.C. Flood, “the Anglican Chaplain at Frankfort”, who preached the first service in this building, 150 years ago.

Now, The Rev. Mr. Flood is not available to preach, this morning. He is among that great multitude of the Church Triumphant, of whom we just heard from The Revelation to St. John. At this moment, he is fully engaged in praising God and experiencing the unlimited joy of God's presence, power and peace.

So you have just me – the heir of The Rev. Mr. Flood – as your preacher on this glorious morning. And wanting to learn from him, I sought to know what he preached, 150 years ago. Yet, I have been unable to find out anything more than what was printed in *The Guardian* of November 9, 1864, that is, what is reprinted in your service booklet: “An excellent and appropriate sermon was preached by the Rev. J.C. Flood, chaplain at Frankfort.”

Well, that doesn't tell us much about what The Rev. Mr. Flood proclaimed as the Good News of God at the first service in this building. “An excellent and appropriate sermon” – hmm, not much guidance there.

I am certainly not going to suggest to you that I am about to preach “an excellent sermon”! If this sermon proves to be “excellent”, the credit must surely go to the Holy Spirit.

But what about “an appropriate sermon”? The Rev. Mr. Flood preached a sermon that was appropriate for the first service here on the Feast of All Saints 1864. But, what kind of sermon might be appropriate for the celebration of 150 years of service to God as part of the Feast of All Saints? Indeed, I have to ask: is a sermon that is appropriate for an anniversary necessarily a sermon that is appropriate for the Feast of All Saints?

Celebrations of anniversaries are by nature retrospective. After all, anniversaries – parish, personal or otherwise – are measured from some date in the past to a present anniversary date. And celebrating this 150th Anniversary, we look back to 1864 and we imagine the joy of that morning, as the English-

speaking congregation gathered in their building— brand-spanking new – and thanked God that they had their own place of worship, a place where they hoped to grow, not only in numbers, but in faith and hope and loving service.

Looking back over a century and a half, we try to feel what they experienced – what was it? A sense of accomplishment? A sense of anticipation? A bit of both?

Hoping to share in their experience, we are gathered, this morning – in part – to place ourselves alongside them in their service, even worshiping God in a style that they would have recognized at that glorious first service of worship.

Yes, celebrations of anniversaries are by nature retrospective, but what about our Scripture readings for this Feast Day? Where do they direct our attention, this morning?

On this Feast of All Saints, our readings invite us to celebrate the wonder of it, that “the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds” was born one of us – some 2,000 years ago – to call into existence the communion of saints, that “wonderful and sacred mystery” of the community of all people united by God through His gifts of forgiveness and divine life in Christ Jesus. Our readings call our attention to God’s saving work in Christ Jesus, work that has spanned the centuries, work that remains unfinished, work that begins and ends outside of time itself.

In our Gospel reading, we heard again how the Incarnate Word – Christ Jesus – came to us, as one of us, bringing us a new vision of what it means to be blessed, a new vision of the profound joy that God intends for all His creatures. It is a strange vision indeed – and why not? It comes from God’s point of view – this vision in which those who seek a right relationship with God must anticipate mourning, hunger and persecution. And yet, Jesus invites us to rejoice and be glad, for he has called us to a great and wonderful future, unlimited by time or space!

And this vision of God is not simply prospective. In these Beatitudes, God is driving us – now – towards divine dissatisfaction with the world as it is, so that we actively anticipate what God intends for us. To experience our profound joy, our truest joy, we must look now to God’s vision for the world and commit our daily lives to it.

If you struggle with the Beatitudes – as I know I do – perhaps our Epistle reading presents this great Good News of Christ Jesus in words that are more soothing to the ears. Because of the coming of the Eternal Son of God and the gift of his spirit to us in Holy Baptism, we are – already – God’s sons and daughters! Is that not something to celebrate on this great day!

We have become God’s daughters and sons by the working of God’s love for us in Christ Jesus, through whom we have been adopted in Holy Baptism. But, wait, there’s more – says the First Letter of John.

Grateful for our adoption and the promise of seeing our Father in Heaven, we hear God’s call to be perfectly compassionate like the Eternal Son and we respond eagerly, calling on God to purify us of all that obstructs our adoration of God or our compassion towards others.

And where does that lead us? Where are we heading? In answer to that question, we’ve received – this morning – a prime slice of the image-thick vision revealed to John.

I taught a Bible study on the Book of Revelation in my last parish, but I know many Anglicans who wouldn't touch that Book with a ten-foot pole – so foreign it seems to our thinking. But how can one take offense at these delicious verses?

God's elect – all the saints – will celebrate the victory that Christ Jesus won us by his loving gift of himself in his life, death and resurrection. Countless people from all nations will give thanks to God, who has purified them in Christ Jesus and brought them home to unlimited joy in God's presence and protection.

No matter what happens to us in this life, John encourages us to hold onto this vision of God's loving desire to unite us with Him. And not as "pie in the sky by and by" – to quote an old song – but as a vision by which to live now as people who offer hope to others in word and deed.

This Anniversary morning, our Festal Scripture readings summon us to look backward – to what God has done in Christ Jesus –and look forward to where God is leading us, so that we look inward – examining our lives in the present –and find our place in time and in eternity. And that suggests to me that our Scripture readings for this Feast Day invite us to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of this parish best by celebrating what God has done and is doing and will do in and through the people – the saints – of this parish.

Celebrate 150 years of St. Augustine's as a place of God's life-saving and transforming grace, where God has washed his creatures' robes white in the waters of Holy Baptism, where God has strengthened his people in divine life through the nourishment of the Scriptures and the Holy Communion!

Celebrate 150 years of St. Augustine's as a place where strangers and other pilgrims seeking a divine home have discovered that they are children of God in Christ and have responded eagerly to their call to grow up fully into their identity as God's beloved sons and daughters!

And celebrate 150 years of St. Augustine's as a place where the poor in spirit, the mournful, the meek and many others have caught the wondrous vision of God that Jesus brings to disquiet us and to empower us now to take part in God's mission of restoring His whole creation to Himself!

And may God bless each of you – and each future member of St. Augustine's – to continue the grace-filled life and work of this parish, participating faithfully in what God has done, is doing and will do for His creation in Christ Jesus, until we are all gathered together before the throne of God and before the Lamb of God – and with The Rev. J.C. Flood and all the rest of that countless multitude – we raise our voices in joyful praise and adoration:

“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne

and to the Lamb! Amen!

Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving

and honor and power and might be to our God

forever and forever! Amen!”