

# Sermon for the Last Sunday of the Church Year – Proper 29C

Colossians 1:11-20

## Sharing in the Inheritance of God's Saints

Today, the Sunday that completes another Church Year is called Sunday of Fulfilment. This morning we thank God for the marvellous way He is fulfilling His plans for us and we look forward to the final and complete fulfilment of the salvation His Son Jesus Christ has won for us. We wait in expectation for that Day of all days when everyone who has believed in our Lord Jesus and loved Him will be gathered before the Throne of our Triune God in endless praise and adoration.

God's Word says, "The memory of the righteous is a blessing (Proverbs 10:7)." Yes, it is truly a blessing to gratefully remember before God His gifts to us of loved ones whom we've treasured, but who are no longer with us. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of God's faithful people (Psalm 116:15)." We thank God for all the blessings our loved ones and dear friends who have died have brought into our lives. The greater our gratitude to their Creator for them, the clearer we see all the blessings God has given to us through them, blessings we didn't notice at the time.

Death doesn't end our relationship with those who have died in Christ. In the "communion of saints", we have a link with them through Christ, a link which transcends death. In our Lord we have indeed "mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won." This happens especially when we receive the Lord's Supper, through which we begin to share in the inheritance of the saints in the Kingdom of Light.

We joyfully give thanks to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ because through Him, we have been given and are assured of our eternal inheritance. The Bible links joy and giving thanks inseparably together. We cannot be joyful without growing in gratitude. Giving thanks to God for all the ways He has so marvellously blessed this past year of grace is a joy for us; something we rejoice in doing. The more we appreciate how abundantly God has bestowed His grace on us since last Christmas, the more we increase in gratefulness and thanksgiving. Are you one of those Christians who feel grateful every time you hear the word GRACE? Charles Colson once wrote, "Every time I hear the word grace, I am reminded that I must live a life, every day, which reflects my gratitude to God."

We can never give thanks to God and one another too much. Let us all endeavour in the new Church Year to express our gratitude as often as we can, and in as many ways as we can. "We are unconscious of that, in normal life, so much more has been

received than we have given and that it is gratitude that first makes life rich (Dietrich Bonhoeffer).” In the months ahead, let gratitude make your life rich in the best sense of the word.

Today’s text comes from St. Paul’s letter to a church in a small, insignificant town, but that letter has colossal impact as it reaches the heights in the wonderful things it says about Jesus. So soon after His resurrection this hymn is written in praise of our Redeemer and the redemption He has won for us in the most exalted language possible. We can never praise and thank Jesus too highly or too much for the wonderful blessings He bestows on us for this life and for all eternity.

We’ve been brought out of the darkness of ignorance, insecurity and uncertainty and into the light of grace and forgiveness. There can be no greater knowledge than to know Christ and His saving benefits; there can be no more wonderful experience than to be fully and freely forgiven by Christ. Forgiveness is our Lord’s barrier-breaking, future-opening gift to us. “For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation (Luther).” Redemption is ours already, with forgiveness its major blessing.

We aren’t just redeemed from sin, death and the devil. We’re also brought into the new life the Kingdom of God’s dearly loved Son has won for us. In Christ, God’s love for us is so fully and completely manifest in His human life. Colossians 1:15-20 is a hymn in praise of Christ, not only as our Redeemer, but also as the One whom together with God, His Father, is the Creator of all things.

Jesus is for us the visible image of the invisible God. Jesus is God with a human face. God’s radiant glory is now seen in the face of Jesus Christ. The fullness of God is now found in our Lord Jesus and nowhere else. “For in Christ the fullness of God lives in a human body (Colossians 2:9).” Christ’s majesty as our Redeemer is matched by His glory as our Creator. We’ve all been co-created by Christ. That’s why He gave everything He had, His own life, to begin the restoration of His creation so badly damaged by the sins of every human being. He’s passionately concerned about His creation. That’s why Jesus preserves His creation so that it too can be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious freedom awaiting us as God’s children.

Our Lord holds our world together so that it can be fully transformed and made altogether new on that Day when God makes all things new. Nothing is left to chance; everything is under Christ’s control for our good. The cross of Christ is the heart and centre of history. It’s the means by which God works His great work of reconciliation and transforms men and women from His enemies into His friends. “In Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting our sins against us and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us (2 Corinthians 5:19).”

Having been reconciled to God, we’re to act as His agents of reconciliation in our community. What a wonderful thing it is when people who have become estranged and alienated from each other, become reconciled again. As the Head of His Body, the Church, Christ conducts His work of reconciliation in our midst. He rules the universe in the interests of His Church throughout our world. Just as a human body is helpless

without its head, so is the Christian Church helpless without the help Christ alone can give it. Jesus tells us, "You can do nothing without Me (John 15:5)." As the Head of His Church, Christ supplies us, its members, with the resources we need to serve Him week by week, day by day. It's through His Church that Christ seeks to bless the rest of His creation. As well as the Head of our Church, Christ is also the model for how we live.

Just as a body is incomplete without its head, so Christ is an indispensable part of our lives. Hence we sing "You, O Christ, are all I want; more than all in You I find." There's no one better or more able to help us than our Lord.

A boy saw an old church building being demolished and exclaimed to his father, "Look, they're going out of business!" Jesus assures us this will never happen. Population shifts may mean that some church buildings will no longer be needed. But Jesus promises us that the Church He loved so much that He gave His life for it, will remain forever. He therefore invites us to share His love for His Church and its members. To know Christ personally is to love Him. The better we get to know our Lord, the more love we will have for others.

As far as our Lord is concerned, it is in His Church that the most important events of history are taking place. The Christian Church is the only community on earth whose future is assured. Christ and the members of His Church are like the spokes and centre of a wheel. The closer we come to Jesus, the closer we come to each other.

There is a legend which tells how Jesus went back to heaven after His time on earth. Even in heaven He bore upon Him the marks of suffering and the cross. The angels were talking to Him, and Gabriel said,

"Master, You must have suffered terribly for men down there."

"I did", said Jesus.

"And", said Gabriel, "do they all know about how You loved them and what You did for them?"

"O, no", said Jesus, "not yet. Just now only a few people in Palestine know."

"What have you done", said Gabriel, "to let everyone know about it?"

Jesus said: "I have asked Peter and James and John and a few others to make it the business of their lives to tell others about Me, and the others still others, and yet others, until the farthest man on the widest circle knows about what I have done."

Gabriel looked very doubtful, for Gabriel knew well what poor stuff men were made of.

"Yes," he said, "but what if Peter and James and John grow tired? What if the people who come after them forget? What if, away down in the twentieth century, people just don't tell others about You? Haven't You made any other plans?"

And Jesus answered, "I haven't made any other plans. I'm counting on them."

Your Lord is counting on you, too. You'd never want to let Him down, would you?

We pray:

*Dear Lord, we thank You for Your gift of loved ones who have departed this life. May we, together with them, share life with You forevermore. Amen.*