

**‘For everything a season’:
Theology through the church year**
Session 13: Kingdom Season
Thy kingdom come ...



And now we give you thanks
because in Christ you have received us as your sons and
daughters, joined us in one fellowship with the saints,
and made us citizens of your kingdom.

(Short Eucharistic Preface, *Common Worship: Times and Seasons*)

All Saints to Advent

The period between All Saints to Advent has a distinctive character. This ‘quasi-season’ has been referred to as the ‘kingdom season’ or ‘kingdomtide’. It originated in the 20th Century, and in Anglican tradition it had more prominence in the liturgical revisions of the 1980s-90s (which predated *Common Worship*). It is still officially part of ordinary time, but there is the option of using the liturgical colour red rather than green (this could represent the Holy Spirit, or sacrifice). The theological emphasis in the liturgy and readings is the universal reign of Christ: something we celebrate during Ascensiontide, and which returns to our focus as the church year ends and the season of Advent approaches. This talk focuses on three important festivals of this ‘season’—All Saints’ (Nov 1st), All Souls’ (Nov 2nd) and Christ the King (last Sunday before Advent)—and draws out some theological themes.

1. All Saints’ Day

The Solemnity of All Saints, also known as “all hallows’ day”. This feast originated in the early church at a time when martyrdom was widespread and it became impractical to remember the lives of all the saints individually. It was established by the 4th Century, and the date was set to Nov 1st by Pope Gregory III (731-41). This is likely an appropriation of existing pagan commemorations of the dead. The feast has three emphases: [1] official ‘saints’ of the sanctorale; [2] unknown or unacknowledged saints (cf ‘Sarah Smith of Golders Green’ in CS Lewis’, *The Great Divorce*); [3] the universal call to holiness for all Christians (‘Hagioi’, ‘holy ones’). In Roman Catholic traditions, a ‘litany of the saints’ is prayed or sung (in *Common Worship*, there is an excellent Anglican alternative called ‘Thanksgiving for the Holy Ones of God’).

1.1 Communion of the Saints

All Saints’ Day is a celebration of our belief in the ‘communion of the saints’ (*Apostles’ Creed*). In the words of the collect for All Saints’, Christians are ‘knit together’ in the ‘mystical body’ of Christ (cf 1 Cor. 12). This includes the ‘great cloud of witnesses’ (cf Heb 12. 1; 22-23) who are separated from us by ‘the narrow stream of death’ (Wesley).

2. All Souls' Day: Commemoration of the faithful departed

Beliefs and practices associated with All Souls' Day vary among Christian churches. In the Roman Catholic tradition, this is a day set aside to pray for the souls of the departed, and many Anglo-Catholic Churches maintain this emphasis (celebrating a Requiem Mass). Others follow Luther in viewing it as an extension of All Saints' Day (remembrance/thanksgiving for the departed). In all traditions it provides an opportunity for the bereaved to remember their departed loved ones, and to set their grief in the wider context of resurrection hope.

2.1 Praying 'for' the departed?

The practice of praying for the departed dates back to the early church, and evidence can be found in Catacomb inscriptions, Patristic writings and Jewish tradition (2 Maccabees 12.41-16). The emphasis in Patristic writings is on a progressive purification and healing after death. Individual death is set within the corporate traditions of the church, as we pray for the coming of the kingdom and the fulfillment of the promise that, at the last, 'all things' will be gathered up in Christ (Eph 1.10), and that mourning, crying and pain will be no more (Rev 21.1-6).

3. Christ the King

A very recent addition to the liturgical calendar, introduced into the Roman Catholic Calendar in 1925, and to the Church of England calendar in 1979. It crowns the liturgical year with a triumphant celebration of Christ's universal reign over heaven and earth, based not on worldly power but on loving and serving others (Matt. 25.31-46).

3.2 Citizens of the Kingdom

What does it mean to be a 'citizen' of the kingdom of heaven (Phil. 3.20)? Does this make us foreigners on earth? Resident aliens? In fact, the 'heavenly' and 'earthly' cities overlap in the present (St Augustine, *City of God*). On the one hand, citizenship is usually a restrictive term (membership of a particular country); on the other hand, heavenly citizenship is a matter of unrestricted communion: a citizenship that is open to all, regardless of nationality, race, gender or any other factor. By praying each day, 'thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven', Christians commit themselves to the ongoing task of bringing about God's will that all on earth may know their calling to become 'citizens of heaven'. As the new church year approaches, we strengthen our resolve to be agents of God's kingdom in the present.

Next talk: January 13th 2019, David Meara on the Doctrine of God.

References:

Clement, O. *The Roots of Christian Mysticism: Texts from the Patristic Era with Commentary* (London, New City, 1992)
Gordon-Taylor, B. and Jones, S. *Celebrating Christ's Appearing* (SPCK, 2008).