All Soul's Day- Remembering with Thanksgiving

Remembering The Faithful Departed.

As the Church approaches All Saints' Day and, in particular, the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed (All Souls Day) on 2nd November, questions often arise: If Scripture does not explicitly command Christians to observe this day, why should the Church set aside a special occasion to remember those who have died? Can it be an occasion to remember the departed with thanksgiving, care for the bereaved, and reaffirm our hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Similarly, has the church lost its liturgical value in conducting such a service for fear of being syncretic in a multi religious society. These questions invite us to look beyond the observance itself and explore its biblical foundations, its place in Anglican tradition, and pastoral significance for the Church today.

In the Common Worship of the Church of England this day is observed with an order of service structured as Requiem Eucharist or a Service of light and Remembrance.

In response to the above question Anglicans do not regard every observance in the liturgical calendar as a direct biblical command. The church set aside occasions for thanksgiving teaching, remembrance and pastoral care which are consistent with scripture and the Christian faith. As for All Souls Day the Church uses this occasion to proclaim the resurrection, to give thanks for faithful lives and minister to those who grieve.

Historical Development

Medieval origin**:** All Souls' Day arose in the Western Church as a commemoration of all the faithful departed, associated with Odilo of Cluny and later spread widely.

Reformation change: Anglican prayer books removed the medieval purgatorial framework, while retaining commendation of the departed in funeral and Communion rites; the 1549 BCP, for example, commended departed servants to God's mercy and everlasting peace.

Modern recovery: Twentieth- and twenty-first-century Anglican liturgies restored a distinct Commemoration of the Faithful Departed on 2 November, framed as remembrance, thanksgiving, and commendation rather than as prayer for release from purgatory.

The Biblical Foundation: Death In The Light Of Resurrection.

John 11: 25-26- Jesus declares himself to be the Resurrection and the life

1Thessalonians 4: 13-18; Christians grieve but not without hope.

Romans 8: 38-39 Neither death nor life can separate us form the love of God in Christ.

1Corinthians 15:20–26, 51–57 Christ's resurrection and the final defeat of death.

Revelation 21:1–5 God's promise to make all things new.

Remembering the faithful Hebrews 11:1–12:1

Christian remembrance does not deny the reality of death or minimise the pain of losing someone. Rather it places grief within the larger promise of Christ's death and resurrection. The Christian hope is not simply that the deceased will live on in our memories but that God holds the faithful in his mercy and promises the resurrection of the dead.

Why Do We Remember The Dead?

The biblical foundation for remembering the faithful departed rests on the Christian understanding of death, grief, resurrection, thanksgiving, and the faithful witness of previous generations. Drawing on these biblical convictions, the Anglican Church sets aside a particular day for corporate worship, providing an opportunity to remember the departed, give thanks for their lives, and reaffirm the hope of resurrection in Jesus Christ. This observance also carries an important pastoral responsibility: to accompany bereaved families in their grief, offer them comfort and support, and encourage all Christians to continue living faithfully in the light of Christ's victory over death.

Understanding The Commemoration Of The Faithful Departed.

In the Church's liturgical calendar, at the month of November points to the remembrances of those who have gone before us.

All Saints' Day, observed on 1st November, when the Church celebrates the witness of the saints, known and unknown, whose lives reflect God's holiness and exemplify Christian discipleship.

The Commemoration of the Faithful Departed, observed on 2nd November, when the Church remembers those who have died, including family members, friends, ordinary Christians, and those who served the Church quietly and faithfully.

Remembrance Sunday is observed on the second Sunday in November usually the Sunday nearest to 11. November. It is to commemorate those who

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died in ward and provides an opportunity to remember the sacrifices of military personal and civilians and to pray for peace and reflect on the Christian calling to reconciliation.

These observances overlap, but they are not interchangeable. All Saints' Day celebrates the holiness of God reflected in the lives of saints; All Soul Day for those who have died and those who mourn; Remembrance Sunday addresses the human cost of war and the Christian calling to peace.

What Does It Mean To Remember The Faithful Departed?

There are four components of remembrance.

First thanksgiving: we give thanks for their lives, faithful service and love for those who have gone before us.

Second, we bring our grief and unanswered questions and sense of loss before God. We grief by remembering our loved ones. We grieve not without hope but in the hope of the resurrection through Jesus Christ.

Third, through the Church we are united in Christ across generation.

Death does not diminish the importance of faithful witness by following the examples of those who have gone before us. We amplify it with the Christian hope as we commend the departed to God's mercy. At the same time to look forward towards the resurrection and fulfilment of God's kingdom.

Our belief is important as we witness to people around us who are of different faiths. Malaysia is a home of diverse faith and people who share a deep desire to honour and preserve family memories as well as care for those who grieve. On this note an overview of the Malaysian context, will clarify the uniqueness of the Christian faith.

Different Faith Understanding

In Malaysia's multiracial and multireligious society, the remembrance of the dead takes different forms according to cultural traditions and religious convictions. Among Chinese communities, Cheng Beng, or Tomb-Sweeping Day, is an occasion when families visit graves and remember their ancestors. Among Hindu families, remembrance may include funeral rites, memorial observances and ancestral rituals, which vary according to regional and family traditions. Muslim communities may also visit graves, remember those who have died and pray for the deceased according to Islamic teachings and practices. Customs vary considerably between communities, families and religious interpretations.

For Christians, remembrance is more than recalling the departed or participating in a church service. Death is not the end, for Jesus Christ has conquered death and taken away its sting. The promise of life beyond death calls us to live faithfully in the present. Thus, we remember the departed with thanksgiving to God for their lives, while holding firmly to the hope of resurrection through Jesus Christ.

Christians will attend the Eucharist service, where the names of departed loved ones are remembered in prayer. Priests may lead memorial services in cemeteries and/or visit families at the graves of their loved ones. Families may also visit graves, place flowers, read Scripture and offer prayers. These practices provide opportunities for grief, family bonding, thanksgiving for the lives of those who have died, and renewed reflection on the Christian hope of eternal life in Christ.

The purpose of this comparison is not to suggest that all religious traditions share the same understanding of death or the afterlife but just to note that there is a common human experience of loss while respecting genuine differences in religious belief.

The Pastoral significance of the day: Accompanying the bereaved

Having considered the biblical meaning of the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed and its place within Malaysia's multiracial and multireligious society, we must now consider its pastoral significance. The commemoration should not remain merely a theological discussion or an annual observance in the Church's calendar. It should speak directly to those who are grieving, particularly those who have recently lost a spouse, parent, child or close friend. For them, remembrance is not simply an act of looking back; it is an experience of loss that may continue to shape their lives for many years.

The Church is therefore called to accompany those who mourn. Particular attention could be given to elderly people who have outlived many members of their families, those grieving a sudden or unexpected death, and those struggling with unresolved relationships or the difficulty of coming to terms with the loss of a loved one. Pastoral visits to their homes can remind them that they are not alone, but belong to a wider Christian family that cares for them. Such ministry should not be confined to All Souls' Day. Rather, it should be an

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ongoing expression of the Church's calling through pastoral visits, prayer, attentive listening and sustained care for the bereaved.

Remembrance Sunday should be reignited this service in our churches. It can move beyond British military -focused observance into a Malaysian Christian act of remembrance, reconciliation and peace making. It can honour all who have suffered through war and violence: servicemen and women, civilians, prisoners, refugees, those displaced during the Japanese Occupation and the Emergency, and families who continue to carry grief

Yet, if the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed is to fulfil its biblical and pastoral purpose, the Church must also examine how it understands and communicates this observance. Differences in churchmanship, Christian upbringing and theological understanding may sometimes lead to uncertainty or reluctance concerning its place in Anglican worship. These differences should not prevent us from engaging in thoughtful reflection. Instead, they invite us to revisit our Anglican heritage, clarify the Christian meaning of remembrance, and consider how this observance can minister faithfully to both the bereaved and the wider congregation.

In the Malaysian context, where people of different faiths share a deep desire to honour their departed loved ones, several important questions deserve our consideration:

1. *A witness to Christian hope:* How can the Anglican Church make the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed a meaningful witness to Christian hope, compassion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

2. *Teaching the Christian faith:* How can clergy, parents and Christian educators explain the distinction between Christian remembrance of the departed and practices rooted in different religious understandings of death and the afterlife, while maintaining respect for our neighbours?

3. *A personal response of faith:* How does remembering those who have gone before us encourage us to live faithfully, serve others with love, and prepare for the fulfilment of God's kingdom?

These questions bring us beyond the observance of a particular day towards a deeper understanding of our Christian calling. Their memory can encourage us to persevere in faith, grow in love and serve Christ more faithfully.

Conclusion

The central Christian proclamation is this: Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again. Therefore, on 2nd November, we remember the faithful departed with thanksgiving rather than despair, trusting in God's promises and the hope of the resurrection. In Malaysia's multiracial and multireligious society, may this commemoration deepen our compassion for the bereaved, strengthen our love for our neighbours, and renew our faith in Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25).

Written by Bishop Charles Samuel

Resources:

1. Leonel L. Mitchell, *Praying Shapes Believing: A Theological Commentary on the Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing, 1985).
2. Church of England. (1662). The book of common-prayer and administration of the sacraments, and their rites and ceremonies of the Church, according to the use of the Church of England: Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David, pointed as they are to be sung or said in churches: And the form and manner of making, ordaining, and consecrating of bishops, priests, and deacons. London: Printed by John Bill and Christopher Barker.
3. Prayer for the faithful departed *(BCP 2019, p. 679)*
4. A propose order of service is available in the Diocesan website.