

All Saints Sunday  
November 6, 2016  
All Saints Day Readings  
Year C, RCL

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From Paul's letter to the Ephesians: "In him you . . . were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit." In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

We are going to be looking at what baptism is, so you might want to get out the Prayer Book to look at the rite. We will start on page 298.

"Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble." These two sentences appear in the Book of Common Prayer at the beginning of the notes for the rite of Baptism. They are among the most important in all of the Prayer Book. They tell us what Baptism is and what it means to be a member of the Church. Baptism is rite of initiation. It is a rite of joining something. And what is it that we join when we are baptized? Here is where gets interesting. We do not join an institution or a club or a tribe or a family. We are baptized into Christ's Body. Let us stop here for a moment and think about that. What is this body into which we are baptized? What is this Body of which we are now members?

The body of Christ is that package of flesh and bone that God used to come among us human beings and join us in our world. The Body of Christ is the means by which God joins heaven to earth and earth to heaven. The Body of Christ is the instrument by which God reconciles the world to God and every person in the world to every other person in the world. The body of Christ of which we are members heals the sick, raises the dead, proclaims the good news of the Kingdom of God, and is offered always for the life of the world. We are in that body. This body of Christ cannot be held by death and rises to new

life, expanded life, glorified life, always. And we are part of that risen body. In short, in Baptism, we become part of God. This is not about getting our name on a certificate or written in a parish register. This is a deep spiritual mystery. We are baptized into a mystical reality. We are no longer just ourselves. We do not give up our personhood, but we give up some of our autonomy to be part of a greater organism. We are one with Christ, we are part of Christ, we are taken into Christ.

The statement says that we are baptized into Christ's Body the Church. This is where we sometimes get confused. For many of us the word "church" conjures up pictures of fancy buildings, rituals of prayer and music and words, organizations with rules and hierarchy and budgets. This is not what is meant here. Our English word "church" translates the Greek word ἐκκλησία (ecclesia). We get such words as "ecclesiastical" from this Greek word. Ἐκκλησία is a compound of the preposition ἐκ, which means "out," and κλήσις, which means "call, calling, or invitation." The church is that which is called out, or invited, an assembly. We are not primarily an organization, much less an institution. We are a bunch of people who have been invited by God to come together and be the flesh and blood of God in the world.

How does this happen? Who are the agents of this rite of Baptism? Who does it? It is full initiation "by water and the Holy Spirit." We humans will get Vivian wet, and God the Holy Spirit will establish the bond that binds Vivian to all of the rest of us and to God. And that bond is "indissoluble." As St. Paul writes in Romans, "nothing can separate us from the love of God." We may wander far away, as did the Prodigal Son. We may commit grave sins. We may reject our faith entirely. But God always remains true to God's covenants. God will never, ever let us out of God's loving attention and care.

As part of this rite, we all join with the candidate in renewing our baptismal covenant. Please turn to page 304. The covenant begins with the Apostle's Creed. In it we affirm our trust in God the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. This three-in-one God is called the Trinity. But please be clear that this is not some test of faith. The creed was not invented by the Church to be a standard of faith. It is rather a shorthand way of describing the God we know, experience, and worship. We and the Apostles experience God as transcendent Other. We experience God as among us as friend and teacher. And we experience God within us advocate and guide. These are three facets of the divine-human relationship.

We then go on with five questions that help us remember how being members of the Body of Christ plays out when we live our lives as Christians. We will be members of each other in the life of the Christian community. We will resist evil in ourselves and in the world around us. We will proclaim the good news that God loves everyone and desires that we all would be one with each other with God. We serve and love all people. We work for justice and peace. (By the way, one way in which we are obliged to fulfill these promises is to use them as criteria when we choose which candidates to vote for on Tuesday.)

These promises are not a set of rules. They represent the nature of our collectivity as member of the Body of Christ. This is how we make Christ present in time and space. This is how we participate in God's work of building the future and of the evolution of the Kingdom. The great paleontologist and mystic, Teilhard de Chardin, wrote, "Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then for a second time in the history of the world, human kind will have discovered fire. "

After we baptize Vivian, we will anoint her with oil to represent her being anointed with the Holy Spirit. As an anointed one, she will be a Christ, a Messiah, as we all are. Together as the Body of Christ and the People of God, we are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We are the physical container of God in this world. As we return to the front of the church, I will sprinkle all of you with the water of baptism as a reminder of your own baptism and that we are one with Vivian in the great adventure of love.

This is a little of what Baptism is. The rest becomes clearer as we live out the great adventure of God's unfolding purposes.

Amen.