Bishop Ian's Sermon at Evensong, All Saints Day 2026

All Good Things

Today is a day I have been awaiting for some time. I mean All Saints Day. We have saints days all through the year, and some of us have favourites, like Francis, or Margaret, Ninian or Cecilia. But every year I wait for 1st November to come round.

I wait for it because it's *All* Saints Day and not *Some* Saints Day. It's not about the famous ones, the impressive ones, the ones with stained glass windows, statues, feast days and biographies. All Saints means all those who turn towards Christ and try, however imperfectly, to grow in his likeness.

And most of them are known to nobody except God and the people they have loved and served. They are ordinary people. People who struggle, for peace, for the poor, for justice for faith. People who suffer. People who show us that the love of God is stronger than anything life can throw at us.

Which is why I have always loved William of Perth. William wasn't a bishop, or a theologian, or a church leader. He was a lay person, a 12th century baker in this city. He gave what he had to the poor. He adopted an abandoned child. He became a pilgrim. And while on that pilgrimage, he gave his life.

Around him grew a story of healing, and people came to his shrine seeking healing and hope. William is a saint not because his life was perfect, but because his life was given in love.

Which is why our 'St William of Perth Award' celebrates the faithful and often hidden service of lay people in our Diocese. Today, it has been my joy to present to the Diocese, this Icon of St William, by Lana Woolford who is here today, as a thanksgiving you for your faithfulness to Christ and your service to others, and for the privilege of serving you. May it be a focus for prayer, prayer for healing and for children, for this city and for working people.

And may it be a reminder that churches exist so that ordinary people may do extraordinary things in the name of Christ, in as many different ways as there are many different people.

The reading from Revelation gives us John's vision of that diversity. He sees a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. Not a uniform crowd, but a multitude of different people, united in the Love that leads them. They have come through suffering and struggle, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

This is the Church as God sees it - a communion gathered around Christ, extending across generations, cultures and nations.

This how a Bishop should see - and how God sees - their Diocese - not as a collection of churches, congregations, and clergy, but as a Communion of Saints - people, living and departed, known and unknown, confident and uncertain, who belong to one another because they belong to Christ.

In a world of uncertainty and threat such as ours is now, churches can be tempted to forget this and play safe, avoid change, retreat into their little institutional life.

But the world still moves on, crises threaten, bishops retire. As history shows, the Church has always changed in order to remain the same. As the world changes, so the Church changes in order to proclaim the unchanging God.

As a young priest in the 1980s, I read the Anglican historian David Edwards. He often used a phrase which has stayed with me. "We are the early Church," he said. "If the future of humankind stretches millennia into the future, then what's past is prologue. Christianity is a young faith whose future is still vastly larger than its past."

"We are not the exhausted remnant of something that once was," he said, "We are, astonishingly, still at the beginning." We are the early Church.

Again as a young priest - millennia ago, it feels - I took groups of young people to Taizé, the ecumenical community in France, and often heard its founder, Brother Roger, speaking about what he called "the Dynamic of the Provisional."

Our institution often behaves as though it must be protected against the world, must last for ever.

But the Church as we see it , Brother Roger said, is provisional. Our buildings, our institutions, our cherished ways of doing things, all are provisional. He warned us against becoming a self-serving institution, whose main goal is self-preservation.The Gospel does not promise that our structures will last for ever. It promises Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and for ever.

And here we are, here I am, at the ending of something that was always provisional, like every ministry. Patrick Stewart, the great actor of our times, who died this week, entitled his final Star Trek episode, “All Good Things.” Whether we complete the phrase or not, he was marking an ending.

“All good things…” are good even when they come to an end. But Christian faith is a faith in which endings, for all good things, are always beginnings, a faith in the God of Resurrection.

Which is why I think Evensong is such a good service for a time like this. Evensong is loved as a calm ending to the day. Yes, it gathers up the day, or indeed the years, and offers them back to God whose gift it has been.

But if we think Evensong is only about ending the day, we have missed something important. Because Evensong isn’t an ending, it’s a beginning.

The Church inherits this from our Jewish cousins - the liturgical practice of beginning every new day at sunset, not at sunrise. For example, Christmas Eve evening is the start of Christmas, not Christmas Day morning. Evensong comes at the beginning not at the end of a day. It’s not a conclusion - it’s a threshold. Its prayers do not simply give thanks for what has been; they entrust to God all that lies ahead: 'Defend us from all perils and dangers of this night.’ Evensong is an act of hope.

In human experience, the hours of night aren’t only a time of rest, they are a time of anxiety, pain, loneliness, even fear. Night is when shadows conceal, when we lie awake with worry or pain, when A&E is busy. Whenever we speak of times or places of darkness, night is the symbol of all that hangs over life, as Isaiah’s shroud, death, is cast over all peoples.

But in the life of faith, as John’s Gospel says,“light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.” And as the anthem said, “Holy is the true light."

Next Easter, remember that the Resurrection didn’t happen in the light of early morning, that’s just when they found the empty tomb. The Resurrection happened in the dark of night before the break of day. Which means that night is where God works quietly, unseen, and in the life of faith, night is a time of expectation, of new growth, and new life.

So when we gather for Evensong, we are doing something quietly hopeful. We are looking to the future with hope, all of us - you and me alike. Because as Oscar Wilde said, “every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future.”

And in the gentle, steady prayer of Evensong, in the presence of William of Perth and all God’s saints, past and present, we place not only our memories, but our future, into God’s hands. Because hope does not wait for the morning. It begins here, in the gathering dusk, in the quiet voices of prayer, in the trust that God’s Love is always at work in the night of faith as it falls, and in the day of hope as it dawns.

+Ian St Andrews

All Saints Day, 1 November 2026