November 1

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The communion of Saints of heaven and earth

It did not take the early churches long to realize that no single martyrology could commemorate all of the saints recognized by the various Christian communities.
Today's solemnity thus came into being in the fourth century. It was first celebrated in the church of Syria, where it was called the feast of "All Martyrs." In Antioch the celebration took place on the Sunday following Pentecost, as a way of emphasizing the indissoluble connection between the outpouring of the Spirit from on high and the witness Christians bear unto martyrdom.
The saints - those who have died for Christ, with Christ and in Christ - are alive with him, a communio sanctorum. Since we are members of Christ's body and they are glorious members of the Lord's glorious body, today the Church in pilgrimage remembers its communion with the Church of heaven, together with which it forms the Lord's one complete body.
Over the centuries the Byzantine churches preserved the Antiochene date of the feast, while Latin Christians took advantage of this celebration to christianize pagan temples and festivals dedicated to "all the gods." In seventh-century Rome, the feast was assigned to May 13, the date on which the Roman Pantheon had become the church of Saint Mary of Martyrs.
The current date of November 1 is probably of Celtic origin, and was imposed on the entire West in 835 by Pope Gregory IV. Falling as it now does in the autumn season, at the end of the harvest, the solemnity of All Saints invites us to contemplate the harvest of all the living sacrifices that have been offered to God, the gathering into his presence of all the ripe fruits that are the work of his love among us. This feast reminds us, against every tendency towards loneliness and isolation in the human heart, that we are not alone; we are a communion destined for life without end.

A READING

The feast of All Saints, which we celebrate today, is truly a memorial of the Church's glorious autumn. It is a feast against loneliness, against all isolation that is in the human heart.
Today we should sing, "We are not alone, we are a communion!" Today we should renew the Easter song, because on Easter we contemplated Christ alive forever at the Father's right hand, and today, thanks to the powers of resurrection that flow from the Easter event, we contemplate those who are in Christ at the Father's right hand, the saints. On Easter, we sang that the vine was alive, risen; today the Church invites us to sing that the branches have yielded their fruit. Cleansed and pruned by the Father on the vine that is Christ, the branches have borne an abundant harvest, and these clusters of grapes, these fruits of the vine are together one wine, the wine of God's kingdom.
If there were no saints, if we did not believe in the communion of saints of heaven and earth, we would be closed in upon ourselves in desperate loneliness.

A monk of the western Church

PRAYER

God of love,
today you gather us together in joyful communion
with your friends, the saints:
grant that we may walk
in Christ's footsteps as they did,
and surrounded by such a great
cloud of witnesses
we will enter your kingdom,
blessed forever and ever.

BIBLICAL READINGS

Heb 11:32-12:4 (vigil); Rev 7:9-17; 1 Jn 3:1-3; Mt 5:1-12

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

ANGLICANS:
All Saints' day

WESTERN CATHOLICS:
All Saints (Roman and Ambrosian calendar)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (22 bâbah/teqemt):
Luke, evangelist

LUTHERANS:
Commemoration of all Saints; Erhard Schnepf (d. 1558), reformer in Württemberg

MARONITES:
All Saints
Cosmas and Damian (d. ca.303), martyrs

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:
Cosmas and Damian, thaumaturges and unmercenaries
Relocation of the relics of John of Rila (1238), monk (Russian Church)
Prochorus of Pcinja and John of Rila (9th cent.), anchorites (Serbian Church)
Nicholas Dvali (d. 1314), hieromartyrs (Georgian Church)

WEST SYRIAN ORTHODOX:
Joh of Erbil and James the Zealot (4th cent.), martyrs
All Saints (Syrian Catholic Church)

EAST SYRIAN ORTHODOX:
Ahha the Egyptian (4th cent.), monk (Assyrian Church)

OLD CATHOLICS:
All Saints