

KNOW YOUR FAITH XVIII

Pastor Don Marxhausen

All Saints

The persecution of Christians began in earnest under the Emperor Nero in 60 C.E. The worship of just one god and not the emperor along with the teaching of Jesus were seen as subversive ideas. Besides, the words of the Eucharist (Body, blood) led to the rumor that Christians were cannibals.

Such adversity had times of intensity and times of quiet indifference. However, under the Emperor Diocletian (286-305), who in many ways was good for the Roman Empire, many more Christians were tortured, exiled, imprisoned and put to death. After a while, the church could not keep track of all the martyrs and saints and so in 609 or 610 Pope Boniface IV dedicated the Pantheon (All gods) to the Blessed Virgin and all martyrs.

Initially, All Saints was celebrated after Pentecost in the spring; but then in the 8th Century Pope Gregory III (741 C.E.) changed the date to November 1st. There is some thought that the influence of the Celts and others who saw the Fall as a time when the wall between this world and the next was/is thin, and the November date would be better. It was/is a time of the lengthening of shadows (Halloween.)

By the 9th Century, it was a day of obligation and so important to the church that after the Reformation the Lutherans and Anglicans kept it on their church calendars. For centuries, the reference was the deceased of the ancient past but in recent times it has also included former members of local congregations and loved ones who have gone on before.

Some churches ring a bell at the reading of each name. Some give out roses to be placed on graves in local cemeteries. In other places, candles are lit and placed in boxes of sand. The most popular hymn for the day is "For All the Saints" (Sine Nomine – Without name) by Ralph Vaughan Williams; great with trumpets. The color of the day is white from the Book of Revelation. "Who are these arrayed in white? These are they who have come through the great persecution and their robes have been made white in the blood of the Lamb."